**Deep Waters, Strange Bedfellows**

by **sablesheep**

Summary

The Dolorosa is glad not to be dead if only so she can feel, for the first time, that she's alive. Alive to suffer and alive to smile; alive to do everything she'd always dreamed she would when they sealed her underground at 18 to await her death and all the things she said goodbye to with the loss of her child.

Alternately, after spending a lifetime tending to others, it's hard to remember what self-preservation feels like. Especially when there's a pirate ship in need of cleaning. But it's a little easier when you think of the fact that the pirate in question is seriously into you.

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A retelling of the Ancestor's stories with a special focus on the events described in Mindfang's journals.

Notes

There are worse places to be than a pirate ship, after all. Especially when the pirate in question is overbearingly attractive and seems to be rather fascinated by you.
or, that awkward moment in which pirates really are that attractive.

The Dolorosa can't tell how long it's been since That Day. In fact, she can't even tell what day of the week it is. She hasn't felt the brush of daylight on her face in what feels like a year, but surely can't be, and she hasn't heard a friendly voice in what feels like longer. Her wrists ache from stiffness and the sores worn open from weeks spent in shackles. If she were to be given one wish, it would be for death. There isn't anything left to live for, after all, and with each hour that passes she finds it more and more difficult to remember how to pronounce her name, how to speak, how to be civilized.

It's worse than darkness. Worse than living underground with the rocky sky pressing down on her like a blunt guillotine, worse than sitting in a jail cell with a shaking child curled against her begging for her to leave him. It's worse than anything because, oh heavens, she's alive. She's alive and they're not, she's alive and she's trapped she's alive and-- well, she could go on. She could go on for days, screaming until her teeth shattered.

She's not the only one here. She knows that much. There are hundreds of them, chained up beside one another like dangerous dogs, creatures broken yet still feared. The pretty ones-- the ones that will sell fast-- are stuck up front where they're kept in pristine condition, spoiled and petted-- in and off of the market in the space of a few days.

The Dolorosa had been up there at first. Until her first potential buyer had grabbed her jaw to inspect her teeth and she'd bitten off three of his fingers. Her owners hadn't killed her, as she'd expected. They'd beaten her within an inch of her life and apologized profusely to the poor, innocent victim and, as quickly as possible, had moved her further back. Undesirable, she was marked. Undesirable and dangerous-- but rare. Rare blood, which makes her life worth something. To shed a drop of it is an offense meriting the highest penalty and, while she's very clearly fallen from grace, none of the traders are willing to be the one to heft the blade-- nor are they willing to lower her price.

She can't fathom why none of them simply turn her in for what must be a massive reward. She's not meant to be here, she knows that much. If the world had gone as it should have, they would have put her to death alongside her children. The reward for her literal head has to be far higher than the payoff for selling her, and yet day after day she remains where she is.

No one speaks to her, except to snarl and jab at her. No one wants to risk incurring her wrath because they're afraid of what they've found and shackled. She remains their, hand chained to hand, wrists to feet, coarse leather collar around her throat that's fastened so tightly it's bruising. Whenever someone pauses at her side and says: "she's a beauty," they're warned off immediately.

She can't what day it was when someone stopped before her and wasn't immediately warned off. The slave master walks past with a potential buyer in tow and, when his the buyer hesitates before her, he doesn't issue a disclaimer. The small, cherished fragment of fighting spirit she has left is smug to know how frightened they are. The rest of her, the part that's bruised and still listening to long-silenced screams of agony, begs for death. If she's purchased and fights back, her owner-- her jaw twitches as she reaches the 'w' in her mind-- will kill her for sure. Just let him buy her, please, please, she'll do anything, just buy her so she can go ahead and die.

"Who's this?" He asks, softly, crouching down before her. Rosa wants to bare her teeth, snarl, lash out, to do something that makes her able to tell her pride 'See, you're still scary! You're not pathetic!' but she's tired. She's so tired, no matter how long she sleeps. Even though she's mildly sure she's being drugged to keep her quiescent which, honestly, is the best course of action for everyone involved in this exchange.
Still, even if she cared enough to fight back, she couldn't say a word or even bare her fangs, her two best defense mechanisms. They'd finally summoned the courage to gag her with a strip of cloth, unsure of what she'll snarl out and afraid of what her teeth can do. When the man, a muscular troll with dark gray skin and a shock of white hair, reaches out a hand for her, she flinches away. He jolts away immediately, holding his hands up by his shoulders as if offering apology to an angry housecat.

"My apologies, Miss." He says, reaching up to doff an imaginary hat. It's a wholly bizarre piece of courtesy and the Dolorosa's reasonably sure that she and the slave master would exchange similarly stymied looks if they were on speaking terms. "Didn't mean to upset you. Just wanted to get a better look at you, that's all."

He gives her an awkward smile and she feels her shoulders slump. Oh hell. He's nice. Look at that face. Look at him. He looks like the kind of person who'd go out of his way to help someone else, even if that cost him a fortune. Probably the sort of man who'd defend a stranger's honor by insisting on dueling the offender at dawn, or some such nonsense. She can't hurt him. It's one matter to bite the hand of a trader interested in owning her body, it's quite another thing entirely to bite of the hand of a man polite enough to show an enslaved woman some kindness. Rosa doesn't know why; if he's here in the first place he can't be that good of a person. Maybe he's a philanthropist? Buying women and setting them free? That happens, doesn't it? She sounds like her son, finding the beauty in anyone who ever hurt him. Answering the door to the armed forces there to arrest him, knowing there was nothing left to do but surrender in a way that would keep his loved ones alive. Not that it did any good, considering that three out of the four of them are dead and number four is trying to convince herself that the man crouched down in front of her is going to be nice to her.

When he reaches out for her once more, she forces herself to remain still. No flinching. No reacting to the potential for pain. No shuddering. To her utter bewilderment he reaches out with a slow, steady hand and loosens her gag. The fabric, already threadbare and mangy when it was tied, can barely hold the knot. When he finally pulls it free from her teeth she lets out a shaky breath, anxiously stretching out her jaw. He holds up the cloth and chuckles at the deep rents her fangs have made in it. Oh mother in heaven she'd forgotten what it felt like to move her face. She'd give anything to be about to put her fingers on it, or to bite into something again. The man has been upgraded to 'you're an idiot for thinking he's nice, this is how your son died, stop lying to yourself' to 'well okay maybe you were right the first time we all make mistakes but just so you know he might still be awful'.

"Sir, I really must protest--" The slaver begins, feebly, his thick accent still foreign to Rosa's ears.

"Oh shut up." The potentially-nice man grumbles, waving a dismissive hand. He's perfectly at ease where he is, in the middle of a squalid, probably illegal slave market in some ungodly humid locale, surrounded by slaves who are alternately terrified to be bought and horrified at having to remain. "Save it for someone who hasn't been around this block more than once."

Rosa listens to them with less than half of her brain, too enamored with the wonderful ache coming into her jaw to pay much attention. Oh dear lord, she can move her tongue again, she can swallow properly she's-- well-- she's thirsty, but what's new. And she can't say for sure the last time she's eaten more than the irritatingly stereotypical husk of bread. She should be afraid right now. Or at least ashamed at how easily her affection can be won, but at some point you find yourself willing to forsake the pride you held so dear just five minutes ago and admit to yourself that you're a soulless husk of a being, desperate for anything to end this suffering. Death, servitude-- either means a change of scenery. Being chained up anywhere else would be an improvement, just for the change of scenery.

"You alright there, Miss?" Her new friend asks, his voice low and endearingly solemn. Not trusting
her voice not to crack, or her tongue not to spit out obscenities out of reflex, she nods. He smiles once more, this time a little more widely. "Good to hear it."

"Thank you." She forces herself to whisper, because, oh god she can breathe without the taste of rotting cloth gagging her. "Thank you."

"Of course, Miss." He says just as softly, like they're old friends exchanging gossip. He's scrutinizing her now, his eyes narrowed and dancing over her body in a way that's oddly mechanical. His head shifts as he makes mental notes on something, biting his lip every time he checks something off what seems to be a mental list of attributes. She's got her horns and her teeth, and while she's been captive long enough that her body's not much to write home about, she's probably still attractive to anyone desperate enough to buy their sexual partners from an illegal slave market. The most abhorrent things about her at the moment are a marked lack of hygiene and upkeep, but that can be easily solved with a bath, a pair of scissors and a nail clippers.

"Sorry. This is weird for me too, you know." He mutters, almost apologetically, his slightly sunburnt face going a deeper shade of gray-green. Rosa feels a quizzical eyebrow twitch, managing to suppress it at the last moment. He notices all the same and looks away, embarrassed. Only when he gets to his feet, brushing off the knees of his pants, does the slave master provide the usual warnings.

"She's a dangerous one, that," He says, voice low as if his pitch will prevent Rosa from hearing. "Almost took a man's hand off."

And a few other men. And some women. And some former employees. Oh, and the last few slaves that were brought over to try to scare her into quiescence. There's been a lot of biting.

"I don't doubt it." The other man responds, giving Rosa a ghost of a wink that makes her jolt up a little bit because-- goodness-- no one ever treats her like that anymore. "But I also think you know who I'm buying for, my friend, and you're more than aware of the Captain's feelings on such matters."

"I can't in good faith--"

"I'll pay triple her worth if you release her to me immediately." He pauses, frowns, and turns to her, face apologetic. "And if you clean her up a bit. Or at least give her something to wear."

Well then. Rosa arches her eyebrows, surprised at the surge of adrenaline that surges through her, making her spirits lift in a way she'd deemed nearly impossible just a few minutes before. She always used to warn 'life can change in a minute' but never actually believed it. But, as if the universe suddenly had a twisted sense of humor, her own prognostications are coming true. This is something wholly unexpected. She wants to tell him that she's really not worth that much-- in her current state she's not useful for work whatsoever-- and that his paying an extortionate sum simply because she bleeds jade is preposterous, but she stays silent. No, as despicable as it is-- she's desperate. Death, which seemed the only desirable outcome as of this morning and dozens of mornings preceding it, is suddenly a much less intoxicating prospect than the one hope offers her. She's suddenly desperate to get out of this warehouse, with its low ceilings and sub-animal conditions, spending each night too terrified to sleep and each day too exhausted to keep her eyes open, hungry, bruised, broken, bleeding, crying to herself without any heed for her audience. No, she wants to leave this place, no matter the cost to her dignity. If she can just get out of here-- if she can just get something to eat, maybe she'll want to escape. She starts to wonder what exactly she'd escape for when there's nothing left for her to run to, but she dismisses that as haughtily as she knows how.

Money changes hands. For the sake of her mental health, already held together only by vengeance and paper mache, she forces herself not to notice. Before she's entirely positive this is really
happening, she's hauled to her feet. Her knees shake furiously as they're forced to bear her weight. It's almost impossible to walk with the shackles around her ankles dragging against her, but she makes herself grit her teeth and bear it. If she doesn't move, someone else will make her and that's not a very desirable option. A dress is quickly found for her, a filthy, musty thing that was never, at any point, actually meant to be attractive. She has the faint inkling that this it's what the maidstaff wears over their clothes when they come through to clean but she can't be sure. She's only seen them clean three times, so she can't be positive. They're wary of freeing her long enough to get the dress on, unshackling her one wrist at a time. When she's finally shoved out of the door of the slave market, the light-- something she'd long for in her fragile moments of hope-- sears her eyes. She flinches, and her escort is immediately at attention. The sun stings her eyes, her face, her neck-- but oh god is it the more wonderful thing she's ever felt. Eyes still forced-shut, she turns her face towards it and savors the warmth. Before she can acclimate herself to it, however, she's been urged towards a waiting carriage. When she trips inside her purchaser jumps in after her, shouting for a passing courier to join him. He's scribbling frantically on a piece of parchment, signs it and folds it haphazardly before dispatching his message with the young, overly-curious courier. Task accomplished, he glances up and, with one look at her terrified face, gives her a lopsided grin.

"Don't look so nervous. It's not me you need to impress," He mutters, gesturing for her to make herself comfortable. Rosa regards him, warily, suddenly unsure if she's actually allowed to sit on the seats or if the floor is her domain. They'd sent other slaves to try and frighten her into obedience, all of them telling her horror stories about cruelly strict masters and mistresses who treated them worse than the slavers did. Rosa didn't think she'd be stupid enough to believe them, but now she regrets not listening more closely. He stares at her and coughs, awkwardly. The carriage takes off and decides for her, throwing her against the wall of the carriage. She curls up in the corner of the bench as small as she can, unnerved by the rocking of the vehicle and the loudness outside of it. "You paid for me." Is all she can think to say, voice still hoarse from disuse.

"Aye, but on my Captain's behalf." He says, as if this makes all the difference. He produces a set of heavy keys from the pocket of his coat and, without comment, bends down and removes the shackles from her ankles. He leaves her wrists secured, apparently kind but not gullible enough to put himself at risk. Rosa approves of this. "I'm just following orders."

That's... not reassuring. But the Dolorosa allows herself to relax, her legs stretching out beside her. He notices her reluctant acceptance with an indecently cheery smile and informs her, in a soft voice, that they're an hour from port and she might as well have a rest. Despite her intention to stay vigilant for any potential threats, she's soon lulled to sleep. It's the first good, deep sleep she's had in months, and when she's shaken out of it she can barely understand where she is. But the sound of waves lapping against the shore and the throaty calls of sailors is enough of a clue and, without too much mental arithmetic, she knows she's at the docks. When the carriage door cracks open, it reveals a magnificent ship, sails billowing in the wind with the sound of cracking whips, and her woodwork is polished to a gleam. It's utterly alien to her-- it's tall and a hundred times the size the Dolorosa always imagined ships. She'd never been to the ocean as a grub, and her underground adolescence never allowed for it, nor did running away with a stolen baby under her arm. Taking a beach-side vacation with all the highbloods never seemed like a good idea to her, shockingly. The sudden implication of the fact that she's been sold to this man's Captain hits her, hard.

Well. Well oh dear. This is... this is not what she'd been expecting when she was sold. She hadn't thought about it too hard, as she vacillated between 'being so angry that they kill me' and 'so heartbroken she wanted to die'. Planning for the future didn't ever come up, except in the vaguest terms as something sinister and undesirable. She can't do this-- she can't! Everyone knows you don't
go near the ocean unless you want to die, and that fact has been honed into her like an arrow repeatedly fired from a close distance.

But she doesn't have a choice. It's this or the slave market, and at least here she has the opportunity to breathe fresh air. She's urged from behind, a hand at the small of her back, guiding her towards the ship. There's a long stretch of wood going from the dock to the side of the ship and she's helped up it by her nice new friend, seemingly prepared to handle any eventuality.

"You're alright," He says, softly, and Rosa realizes that she must be showing her fear more readily than she'd meant to. "Easy now, sweetheart. Easy now."

He guides her across the deck of the ship, eventually half-carrying her when her legs decide they've done enough work for today. She's lead to a small room just off the gangway-- she knew there was a word for that!-- or since it's a ship, is it called a cabin? Yes, it's a cabin, she knows that much. It's a small room, with a few pieces of furniture, but all she sees is the bed. He helps her on it, saying quiet platitudes until she stops shaking.

"There. Better?" He asks, quietly, and she can only bring herself to nod. This isn't what she expected whatsoever when she was purchased. Not at all. She was expecting darkness, dankness, pain, the horrible living nightmare of a slave hold beneath the ground. That's what she'd heard whispers of, at the least. But so far, all she's had is blunt kindness and nervous smiles. He even informs her that he'll find her some water and something to eat. She wants a bath first but, she supposes she could find the inner strength to eat something.

He leaves without a word, bowing slightly. The door shuts behind him and she expects to hear the click of a lock, but-- to her immense surprise-- there's nothing.

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Rosa's not sure what she's expected to do now because no one has come to drag her out of her cabin. No one's even come to lock her in. Her companion came back and offered her a half-loaf of bread and a carafe of water, waiting patiently while she broke her fast. It's not a particularly elegant meal, but she's starved enough times in her life that she knows you have to start off slowly. But he offered no wisdom on what she should do now, just giving her a friendly 'you'll be okay' and nothing more. No 'stay here until the Captain needs you' or 'if you try to escape we'll behead you' like she was rather expecting. Instead she's received nothing but awkward cordiality. While it's not exactly the worst thing in the world, it is beginning to make her nervous. Her skin feels like it's crawling and she does her best to calm her frazzled nerves by repeatedly smoothing out the fabric of her skirt.

It's degrading to be like this, surprisingly. Her fear jackknifes like a weak branch in a storm. 'I'm going to die', 'This is so unfair', 'I'm going to die". Rosa doesn't know how she can be expected to behave as if this is completely normal and she was born into this sort of lifestyle. She hadn't been, and she doesn't know how anyone expects her to pass herself off as a successful slave. Yes, she's spent the past few months sitting in chains in the back of the slave market but-- well-- as of yet, she hasn't exactly been... broken in. Oh god that's a terrible phrase. But it's true, she supposes. By this time tomorrow afternoon her will to live will, once again, be absolutely shattered.

Come along now dear, she scolds herself, rising off the bed on shaky feet. There's nothing to be frightened of, hmm? The unknown? You've faced much more trying odds than this! Perhaps you'll be lucky and he'll turn out to be a wonderful young man and you'll fall madly in love and it will all be terribly romantic.

She huffs, blowing her hair out of her face and then, almost compulsively, reaching up with manacled hands to brush it flat once more. Really, they should have had the courtesy to supply her
with a mirror. She has to look quite the sight after being dragged through a marketplace and-- to be quite fair to her-- it would only be kind to allow her to present herself in the most appealing light.

The cabin they've shunted her in, at the very least, is far more well-appointed than she'd been expecting. She had heard whispered tales of the sorts of places they stuck trolls in her position and, to be perfectly frank, she'd been dreading the cold dankness of a slave hold more than anything. She could tolerate the abuses and the labor if only she had the small luxury of a clean bed. The little room she's in is small and could rather use a good scrubbing, but it has a pair of portholes that let in just enough of the starlight to give her a beautiful view of the ocean beyond.

She's never seen the ocean before. The thought takes the breath out of her lungs and she sinks onto the bed once more with a jangle of chains. The collar secured around her neck is beginning to chafe and she wants to reach up and rip it off but, dear merciful heaven, she doesn't have that choice. She'll never have that choice.

No. Don't think about that. Think about the ocean. Think about how you can hear the waves from here and how beautiful the sunrise will be in the morning. Think about how much your son would have loved this and think about all of the lovely possibilities--

She doesn't realize how tightly she'd dug her fingers into her knees until the first pinpricks of blood rise. She lets go with a startled gasp, quickly blotting it away. Shifting her hands to the bed cover, she repeatedly runs her hands over it, trying to calm herself with the feel of rough wool under her palms but is quickly stymied. The bed isn't trimmed in wool but rather draped in a feather duvet. She turns her curious stare down at it, eyebrows drawn in tightly.

This isn't right at all. The blanket isn't new by any stretch of the imagination, but it is in good condition. And, as she looks closer, the bed is further outfitted by beautifully trimmed sheets that looks absolutely divine and pristinely clean. How absolutely curious--

Unless. Perhaps... they've stuck her in the Captain's room already? The thought sticks in her mind and rankles until she realizes first, how small the space is and second, that it's distinctly lacking any form of nautical memorabilia.

There's a knock at the door. Rosa gasps, startled out of her contemplation of the bed into a quick focus on the dire nature of her situation. Instead of letting out a soft, obsequious reply like she's probably supposed to, she gets to her feet immediately, fixes her ragged dress and lets out a gracious "Come in."

She regrets the inflection almost immediately, doing her best not to let a sudden surge of panic keep her from being able to breathe. She'll be fine. She'll be absolutely fine. They can't harm her for something as simple as two words, surely?

Her 'friend' is back, giving her another curt yet friendly smile. "Captain's coming. Make yourself presentable." His words are clearly intended as a warning-- a tip off. For them both, she supposes, since he had been the one to make the transaction on his master's behalf.

Should she be sitting on the bed? Is that allowed? Should she be on the floor, instead? Was there a specific position? A barrage of panicked remembrances and advice given by the other captives trapped in the slave market begin to jumble itself up inside of her brain.

"I realize it's a little bit of an imposition, but," He murmurs, stepping into the room. "But I'm going to have to ask you to acquiesce to being blindfolded."

Rosa stares at him mutely, and does her best to find the words to describe the overwhelming sense of
outrage that's struggling to make itself known. "Is is... is it necessary?"

"Yes, Miss. I'm very sorry, but it's the only way we have to protect you and Captain if the situation doesn't... pan out."

"Oh." They might send her back? That's. Well. Not good. She doesn't want that. Sitting bored in a nice room is a vast improvement over sitting chained in a slave market.

"Don't look so scared. The Captain's quite nice once you get past the--" He makes an odd hand gesture and wrinkles his nose.

Get past the what? What does he mean? What does that mean! She needs to know what he means, oh god what does he mean what if she can't get past it, what if--

"Just don't let on that you're afraid and it'll all go dandy." He says with a reassuring smile.


Dandy. Sitting on the edge of the bed, now blindfolded in addition to manacled, the Dolorosa wants to strangle him. Dandy? Who uses an expression like that to describe handing over an enslaved creature with free will and independent hopes and ambitions to their new owner? No one, that's who. Well, perhaps total assholes but she doesn't like to use language like that.

Now that she can't see, the smell of the room is beginning to bother her a bit. The ship had cast off it's moorings a good hour ago, now, and between the rocking and the odor, she's not sure what's more alien. It's not a bad smell, mind you. She's smelled a plethora of terrible things-- corpses, murder victims and singed flesh included-- but it's a stale smell that indicates that the room hasn't been aired out for quite some time. It makes her want to shuffle over to the windows and throw them open and maybe find some flowers because wouldn't that be lovely?

No, Rosa. She scolds herself, jangling the chains around her wrist. Honestly, what was wrong with her? Captive on a merchant ship and all she can think about is redecorating. Shouldn't she be more concerned with her well-being? Think about that! Think about the horrible things this Captain is probably going to do to you. Any man who would buy someone without vetting the purchase first can't have good taste whatsoever.

Honestly. Except for that the ship really is quite gorgeous, with beautifully carved detailing on the bow and railings and the brief glimpse she'd had of the bridge had shown her that it had lovely stained glass windows and--

Rosa. No. No. Stop that.

You really are quite dreadful at this, she scolds herself. Perhaps it's the fact that she knows perfectly well nothing worse can happen to her than--

Well, we're not going to discuss that right now. Because bursting into hysterical sobs and hiding under the bed isn't exactly an option, now is it? Honestly.

It has to have been at least a quarter hour, now. How long do they expect her to sit here in absolute darkness like this? It's a bit silly, isn't it? Who are they trying to protect? Surely if the Captain isn't fond of her they can simply slit her throat and throw her overboard without any sort of difficulty whatsoever. They are heading towards the middle of the ocean, after all.

There's a loud 'thunk' from the wall to her right and Rosa jumps, nearly tumbling off the bed. There's a sudden flurry of activity from outside and she hears quite a fair amount of indistinct shouting and
more than a little foul language. Then there's the sudden, familiar sound of boot heels on wood. Each step that their owner makes is authoritative and assured and, to her surprise, there's a sudden echo of a sultry female voice. The Captain's Matesprit, perhaps?

She can't make out what the woman is saying, but the clip of her heels-- because those have to belong to a woman, she knows what sound men's heels make and it's far more clunky than the exact, sharp snap of a woman’s heel. The sound of heels making their way across the ship is a little heavier and more assured than she's used to hearing, but with a shrug she writes it off as a side-effect of being romantically involved with the Captain of such a lovely ship.

It is a lovely ship, she muses, even if it could use a little more... detail oriented cleaning. But that's neither here nor there, given the situation. Perhaps she needs to stop and consider what in fresh hell the Matesprit is going to do about her consort keeping another woman instead of worrying about her happiness. She sounds like she's yelling about something, so she's clearly not in a very good mood to begin with.

Oh dear. Things she hadn't considered yet--

Suddenly, there's the voice of the troll who'd brought her here. He's saying something about the Captain and welcoming back and lots of rather lovely, polite nonsense. So the Captain must have come aboard with his high-heel wearing companion, then.

Then, to her shock and generalized horror the words 'girl' (she's hardly a girl, although the implication does make her flush a little with pride) 'bought' and 'guest quarters' are mentioned. Oh, this is the guest room then? That was rather nice of him to put her in here. She really should write him a thank you note- 

Rosa stop that. Sarcasm isn't going to make things any better.

There's some indistinct grumbling. She makes out the words 'what am I going to do with' and 'you keep doing these things' and it's not very reassuring whatsoever because that must be the Captain and with such a surly attitude Rosa's not going to be in for very kindly treatment but then there's someone opening the door and-- well--

She doesn't hear voices anymore, which is a surprise because shouldn't everything have gotten louder? But then there's a sharp intake of breath and a soft hum of approval and-- well--

"I think we can raise anchor, Marcus." The voice is low but still distinctly feminine and it curls around her ears like the shudder of a cat brushing against her leg. "And I take it back. I'm not going to throw you overboard."

"I thought so, Captain."

* * *

The cabin door shuts with the ominous click of a lock. Rosa is still too busy reeling from the sudden realization that her new Master is actually her Mistress and has a voice that sounds like liquid sex. It's a voice that demands to be impressed, and she finds herself sitting up taller, trying to make herself as presentable as possible.

There's silence for a good few moments, during which she can practically hear herself being judged by the Captain. Her breathing is soft and after while she laughs to herself and strides forward.

"My my..." She purrs, her fingers curling around Rosa's jaw in a gentle caress. Her hands are encased in leather gloves that feel stiff against the roughness of her skin. Rosa expected to feel the
warmth of her new Mistress's hands through the hide, but instead all she feels is a chill.

p>"Aren't we gorgeous." She purrs and there's the sudden feeling of warm breath curling around her face as the woman leans in closer, chuckling. Her words make Rosa shiver and unconsciously attempt to lean away. Oh dear. That's... that's... well, that's a compliment. But one that sounds like a threat of things to come.

She swallows, hardly able to remember how. What is she supposed to do? How is she meant to react? Oh dear-- She goes rigid as a thumb brushes over her lips. She lets them be parted, breathing deeply to keep herself from whining. Oh dear indeed.

The Captain tsks in mocking disappointment. "Nothing to say to your Mistress, little one?"

Rosa somehow manages to rein in her bolting courage, bringing it to attention. You've faced down armies. You can face down a single woman. "Thank you, Mistress." Her voice comes out warm and rumbling and ever-so-slightly wry and she regrets it almost immediately because, well, it's hardly an appropriate tone to take, is it?

"Oh my, my..." The Captain murmurs, her hands tracing up across her cheekbones then up to outline the shape of her horns. "Someone has a bit of a tongue."

Rosa's breath hitches in her throat as a thumb traces the curve of her hooked horn. She desperately wants to nuzzle into the caress, even though she knows this is a polite way of inspecting her purchase. It's incredibly degrading, of course, but she appreciates the tact-- at least her jaw hasn't been wrenched open so her teeth can be inspected. But it's very hard to experience this objectively when she's being touched like this.

"My apologies, Mistress." She says with a bit of a nervous quaver to her voice. She knows her eyes are wider than they should be behind the blindfold-- she's hardly naive, and it's hardly right for her to be so ridiculously embarrassed by mild flirtation. But. Well. There's something a little exciting about this, degradation or not.

"Mmm, none needed, Pet." The wandering hands are now at the neckline of her shirt-like dress. She tenses under the proposed examination and lets out a nervous whine. The hand stills. There's a tense moment that's drawn out, painfully, until the fingers retreat. Rosa wonders if she should expect violence, but has no idea what quarter that might take. Finally, her Mistress growls in irritation, but pats her on the cheek and steps away. With a sharp tug at her collar, still painfully tight, she urges Rosa to stand. "Get up."

Rosa hesitates.

"Up. Now." It's a sharp, petulant demand, leaving no room for rebellion-- at least not this early on in their acquaintanceship.

She gets to her feet, slowly-- blindly-- her pride keeping her from reaching out and using her owner to steady herself. Only the soft jangling of the chains betrays her nerves, as the rest of her trembling could easily be explained away. Rosa knows how to carry herself in difficult times, and it usually requires looking as sure of one's self as possible without seeming conceited. She knows she must look almost farcical-- standing there with a frown and confidently set shoulder while wearing manacles, a blindfold and a dress that is probably made from old sacks, not to mention a worn out leather collar with a tarnished brass ring.

The Captain, however, doesn't seem to mind any of those flaws. She lets out a slow hum of appreciating, and Rosa feels hands trailing down the curves of her waist.
"You are a treasure, aren't you? My, my, what was such a prize like you doing in the middle of a slave market? Poor darling," she says, almost saccharine in her sympathy. Rosa can't tell if she's teasing or mocking, but either way it hardly seems sincere. Rosa tilts her head back as the Captain strokes her hands over her neck and collarbones, making contemplative noises as she does so. There's a slight tug at the collar once more, and then an indecipherable noise of disapproval.

"Do you have a name, Pet?" She murmurs, finally ending her inspection and-- from the sound of it-- sinking onto the bed with the sound of shifting bedframe. Rosa's not sure if she's allowed to sit or not so she remains standing, her hands clasped before her.

The Dolorosa doesn't answer. She bites her lip and stares at the ground. She doesn't know what to say. Indecision strikes like poison, making her head swim. She's exhausted from a day of unexpected events and suddenly just wants to cry or sleep. First she was afraid, then she was bored, now she's dealing with a flirtatious sailor and doesn't even know what name she's supposed to give. No one's called her by her 6-letter name since she tended the Mother Grub and even then she hated being called it. The second of her wayward children was the one to first call her 'Dolorosa' and that was meant as a fond, exasperated rejoinder in the face of her near-constant solemnity. 'Rosa, Rosa, Rosa, we're not dead yet, stop looking so sad' he'd laughed, from the other side of their jail cell, the sound indicating fear more than amusement, although it was always hard to tell with him. The joking title doesn't seem funny anymore.

If she's going to be known as anything, it should be 'Dolorosa' she supposes. But titles are always unique, and admitting that she's called 'Dolorosa' is the equivalent of saying 'oh, yes, I was the mother of the Signless, oh? What's this? Arresting me?' because-- it occurs to her belatedly-- a captain of a ship is likely to be a highblood (unless it's a pirate ship, but even she's not that fanciful).

"Or, perhaps," the Captain's voice is surprisingly gentle and not in the silly mocking way it was only moments before. "A title you'd prefer?"

"They call me the Dolorosa, Mistress." She finally murmurs, her fingers clenching around her dress. She waits for a noise of scandalized horror, but all she gets is a bored noise of dismissal.

"Dolorosa, hmm?" The Captain stands, slowly, after a few moments of contemplation. Rosa flinches and cries out as the Captain's hands curl around her hair and struggle with the knot. She yanks Rosa's hair a few times, but it's better than the anticipated strangulation. Eventually the Captain swears and Rosa hears the rasping 'shing' of a knife coming free of a leather sheathe. The Captain makes a noise of smug victory, yanking it free. Rosa blinks slowly as she's confronted with the coy smirk of her new owner. "I don't think I like the ring of that."

"My apologies, Mistress." She can't tear her eyes away from the Captain's, even though she knows she probably should. But her eyes are a deep blue the shade of sapphire-- or maybe its cobalt? something with a 'c'-- a blue like the color a forest lake. Rosa's not used to blue eyes, let alone beautiful blue eyes in an equally attractive face.

The Captain chuckles in apparent delight, not minding Rosa's stare. Her smile spreads to reveal a pair of perfect fangs that even Rosa envies. "Darling, I hardly think it's your fault. Perhaps... perhaps I'll call you Rosa."

Her honest answer would be 'everyone does, don't worry about it' but that doesn't seem an appropriate thing to say. "If you wish, Mistress."

"Do you mind?" She says, her voice placing sharp emphasis on the last word, seeming to dare Rosa to say otherwise. Possibly wanting her to. Rosa doesn't know what to make of her, yet.
"No, Mistress. I don't." Rosa ventures a slight shrug, desperately wanting to know if she can get back on the bed now. Her bravado won't last much longer before she collapses, and she'd like to avoid making a spectacle of herself.

"Good girl." She pats Rosa's cheek with a leather-gloved hand and Rosa shivers at the contact, more out of pleasure than fear. "It's been a pleasure, Rosa..."

With a final smirk and a once-over that promises devious things to come, she departs. The door closes behind her with a loud 'thud' and Rosa collapses onto the bed, finally, trembling and panting into the pillow. What just happened? What the hell just happened?

* * *

Rosa is left, once again, to her own devices. No one seems concerned about the possible dangers of leaving a brand-new slave unattended. Probably because they're on the ocean and she has no place to run. Her mistress hadn't replaced the blindfold and she hadn't said anything about responsibilities or behavioral expectations or, um, anything even remotely useful. Except for making it devastatingly obvious that Rosa hasn't been brought aboard to do menial labor.

Lying on the bed staring up at the ceiling is hardly the most productive means of passing the time, but she's the most comfortable she's been in years, with a pillow under her head and a mattress at her back. Isn't this just her luck. Get forced into slavery, end up purchased by an absolutely stunning woman and have absolutely no idea what her intentions are. Not not really be able to say 'no'.

She's alone in the cabin for what feels like a good hour or so before the Captain returns. This time she seems a little more relaxed, still in boots but out of that wonderfully dramatic coat and left in a pair of tight pants and a loose button-down. She still looks attractive, though, damn her. Rosa sits up so quickly that she gets dizzy.

Balanced precariously in the woman's hands is a tray of food, which Rosa is happy to see, and tucked beneath her arms is a bottle of wine and a bottle of what appears to be rum.

Normally Rosa wouldn't approve of alcohol as a coping mechanism but in this case-- enslaved on a merchant ship bound for heaven knows where at the whim of an admittedly gorgeous woman who's completely entitled to have her way with her-- it doesn't seem to matter.

She isn't sure if she should feel relieved or horrified by the fact that she's assuredly destined for sexual service. Her entire body begins to warm at the thought, more from fear than anticipation, and she instinctively tenses as if her posture can ward off any untoward advances. She knows perfectly well, in a biological sense, that she is most suited to sexual slavery. It's a bit crass to say so, but it's true. First of all, she is female and second of all, living in an underground cavern with a large group of similarly repressed women has a tendency to destroy any chances of freeing yourself from shackles of purity and, well-- she's not suited for much else, now is she? Intense physical labor would kill her in a few short years, and she has no useful physic talents to be exploited.

And, after all, she knows her price was higher for having been untouched (to put it delicately).

She wanted to remark upon hearing so that inexperience in a coerced sexual partner probably wasn't an asset, seeing that-- in addition to having to forcibly overtake her to engage in the coital act-- the purchaser would also be forced to endure a rather unpleasant series of intimate encounters, but she didn't think saying so could possibly benefit anyone. The only possibly useful facet of her virginity is the fact that anyone who copulates with her wouldn't be exposed to anything untoward. But in her mind that doesn't really seem like much of a valuable factor.
This train of thought isn't going to go anywhere beneficial in the slightest, so she abandons it. Stop that, Rosa, she scolds for what feels like the tenth time today. Pay attention!

"I apologize for not being able to assist you, Mistress." Rosa murmurs, hands neatly folded in her lap. The Captain chuckles and places the tray on the small table beside the bed. The two bottles soon follow and then, to Rosa's almost incorrigible shock, she's fumbling in her bodice for something. With a triumphant caw she produces a key. She inserts the key into the shackle on Rosa's left wrist and gives it falls to the floor with a crack and a snap, soon joined with its right-sided brethren.

"That's better, Pet." Her Mistress murmurs, kicking them far under the bed. "Nasty things. Ugh. Remind me to throw them overboard."

"If this is some form of psychological warfare, I must be honest and inform you it will be effective." Rosa can't take the words back and, for once, she doesn't really want to. She's too fixated on how light her wrists feel without the irons clapped around them. Between being arrested for treason and being pressganged into slavery, she's been in shackles for... ugh she doesn't even know how long.

"It's not. I don't have the patience for that shit." The Captain gives her a small, sincere smile, pulling up the one chair and sitting with a leg tucked beneath her. She extends a hand and curls her fingers in a beckoning gesture, indicating Rosa's hands. Without thinking, Rosa complies. It's the right thing to do, but as the Captain's fingers, rough and calloused, trace over the raw, bruised skin of her wrists, she starts to fear something far worse than a pair of handcuffs is in her future.

The Captain seems to anticipate this and keeps the contact brief before releasing Rosa's hands. Rosa gratefully returns them to her lap, her heart thump thump thumping in her chest. She'd curl them protectively against her, but she wants to salvage some of her dignity.

"I am the Marquise Spinneret Mindfang and I am the Captain of the good ship *Black Widow*." The Captain finally breaks the terse silence with her velvety voice, languorous with her elocution. "I will be frank with you and inform you now that we do not fly the flag of the empire."

"Oh. A pirate, then?" Rosa asks, almost laughing. The Captain, Mindfang, nods.

"And I am your new mistress." She's watching Rosa for any sign of reaction which she does her best not to give. Not taking that bait, thank you though. "I am hoping we can get along amicably."

It's not a threat, but it's not a friendly proposal. It's something in the middle, a very clear indication of what Mindfang expects. She isn't threatening her because she knows it will not be a problem, because no one in their right mind would be stupid enough to disobey her. "I-- I am sure we will, Mistress."

"Good." She smiles, a little more sly than friendly. "I would hate to be in disagreement with such a beautiful woman."

Rosa does her best not to shiver and stares once more at her hands. They're genuinely beginning to ache without the familiar presence and she almost wants to ask that a suitable replacement be found because the prospect of being freed, even if it's free on board a ship, is beginning making her incredibly uncomfortable. There must be a price to be paid for her physical freedom-- you don't simply receive a favor without the expectation of future repayment.

Mindfang follows the line of her gaze and sighs, broodingly. "See? That's why I don't see why anyone thinks those awful things are a good idea. Look at what they did to you, hmm? That lovely skin of yours."
Her voice is full of a sharp anger that makes Rosa flinch without meaning to. Anger is bad, anger is very bad--

Mindfang huffs and pads over to the door, throwing it open. She bellows something that doesn't make any sense to Rosa but seems to be coherent to the crew. Someone shouts 'YES, CAPTAIN!' and, in the distance, Rosa hears her knight errant bellowing 'FOR FUCK'S SAKE DON'T YELL IN MY EAR'. She's somewhat glad to know he's still here.

"Honestly. You can get padded handcuffs, you know." Mindfang mutters, letting out a frustrated sigh. "Is there someone I can complain to about this?"

"I-- I wouldn't know, Mistress?" Is she joking? Or is she honestly asking? Either way, Rosa doesn't know how to be blase about months of imprisonment bordering on torture.

"Mmmrggh, probably a lot of paperwork anyways."

One of the sailors appears at the doorway with something. Mindfang takes it from him with a gruff 'thank you', and closes the door. It's a beat-up looking canvas bag on which someone has scrawled 'FIRST AID KIT' and underneath that 'ASK HOLLIS BEFORE USING'. She's quite taken aback by the sight of it which is silly, but...

Well maybe it's not silly. Maybe it's rather sensible. After all, who in the world takes so much concern over their slave's sore wrists? Not many people purchasing their slaves off an illegal market, she assumes.

"Let me see those, Pet." Mindfang murmurs, gesturing for her wrists once more. Rosa extends them without hesitation. Mindfang allows her to rest them against her arm as she rummages through the first aid kit. Wouldn't it be smarter to put that in a metal box? Rosa's no doctor, but allowing things to knock together like that can't be good.

Eventually the pirate produces a small amber glass jar, full of an unidentified ointment. When she cracks the lid both Mindfang and Rosa flinch back from the smell of tea tree oil and eucalyptus. It might make her eyes water, but it feels almost heavenly when it goes across her skin. She hisses in pain the entire time, hoping for it to be over with while rejoicing in the relief.

"Better?" The Captain asks with a small smile. Rosa nods and Mindfang looks rather pleased with herself. The irritated skin is wrapped in gauze and carefully taped before she feels allowed to take her arms back. The feeling of the bandages is enough of a reminder of her position and, for the moment, her nerves about being 'freed' are quelled.

"I don't mean to be rude, Mistress but--"

"If you don't want to be rude then don't ask anything stupid." Mindfang says crisply, crossing her legs and arching her eyebrows. She holds Rosa's gaze until she turns to stare at the floor.

"My apologies, Mistress."

There's an awkward silence for a few moments, broken only by Mindfang cracking open the bottle of rum and filling a tumbler. Rosa watches in mute admiration

"You don't seem like you're worth the trouble of manacles." Her mistress murmurs over the rim of her glass, rolling her eyes. "Honestly. I was expecting a bit of a spark from what Marcus was saying."

Rosa's pride demands she prove wrong any assumptions of good behavior in the future, but she's
force to admit that it's true she never tried to escape her captors. And right now she's hardly likely to
run. She's disoriented and caught off-guard. The only misbehavior she's likely to indulge in is
oversleeping or overeating. "I'm sorry to disappoint you Mistress." She replies, keeping her voice
soft and downtrodden.

"Hmph. I suppose you're enough of a treasure to make up for boredom."

What, does she want a bit of feistiness? Because Rosa's quite capable of being feisty. She took out
half of the imperial guard and spent half of her life slaying the predatory beasts that liked to prey
upon the little ones in the caverns. She's hardly a pliant little obedient wretch-- She stares down at her
fingers and winces. Perhaps that's what she's become, lately. But it doesn't mean she doesn't still
have feelings to the contrary.

"Don't look so frightened, Pet." Mindfang mutters, snorting to herself as she pours a glass of wine.
Rosa's startled by it because she's already downing a second glass of rum, but Mindfang instead
shoves it into Rosa's hands. When Rosa simply sits there and stares at her in astonishment, she huffs
and carefully guides the glass towards Rosa's lips.

"I'm hardly going to beat defiance into you, am I?" Mindfang sniffs, looking utterly disparaging and,
queerly, a little disappointed.

"Well, Mistress, you never know. Only time will tell me if you're intelligent or just have a nice voice
and a massive vocabulary." In an attempt to look more at ease than she actually is Rosa sips too
much once at once. It is, at the least, very good (for all she knows). "I have only had the pleasure of
your acquaintance for two hours, Mistress."

As far as comebacks go, it's pretty tame. Normally she's a bit more caustic than that, but her other
ideas mostly alluded to her being a hot pirate and that doesn't seem like something she should admit
to just yet. The incredulous look on Mindfang's face is almost comical. It would be completely
amusing if it weren't for the fact that Rosa's suddenly not sure it was a very good idea to show her
cards so early on in the game. "...I retract my previous statement."

"My apologies Mistress." This really is wonderful wine. It's going to go straight to her head in all of
six minutes but the idea of that isn't exactly as terrible as it could be with the look Mindfang is
currently giving her. Rosa has a feeling she's about to be tackled to the bed and-- well-- reminded of
a few things. Oh god she doesn't want to be beaten. That's hardly a good way to begin a relationship.

"I think we're going to get along. " Mindfang finally says, a little hesitantly and with the slyest little
smirk. "I think we're going to get along quite well."

Rosa returns her smile with a half-hearted one of her own, not sure how to respond. She settles for
sipping at her wine once more. Mindfang's still looking at her, her eyes making slow movements
over every inch of her. The Dolorosa does her best not to let it rattler her and instead focuses on
looking blithely unaware that she's been sized up like a potential rival. She briefly wonders if she's
going to be allowed to eat anytime soon because that looks just like some very lovely cheese and--

"You're absolutely stunning." Her mistress repeats, tossing back the last of her rum before returning
her glass to the silver tray. "I mean absolutely stunning. How the fuck did it take you so long to fall
into someone's hands?"

She shrugs, softly, and stares at the floor. "I don't know, Mistress."

"Oh, come now, Pet," Mindfang coos, climbing off the chair and looming over Rosa. She tilts her
head back with her fingers, blue-spectrum touch cold against Rosa's green-spectrum skin. She traces
her lower lip once more, eyes glimmering with mischief as she gauges Rosa's response. "Don't be a shrinking violet." Rosa only has time to stare back before she swoops in and captures her, the soft touch on her chin anchoring against any attempts to get away.

The wineglass almost slips out of her hands. Mindfang catches it without breaking the kiss, deftly setting it onto the table. In the same fluid motion she climbs onto the bed and pushes Rosa against the wall, finally pulling away with a satisfied grin. She's still smiling like a cat who's just realized there's an unguarded canary in the front room. Rosa's already turning several shades of embarrassed.

"Shhht." Mindfang purrs, straddling her easily. Rosa squirms in a belated attempt to get away, her emaciated body useless as she tries to shove her away. The woman remains, statuelike, where she is. Her efforts at escape eventually trail off to pitiful whining, unverbalized pleas aborted before they can turn into syllables. Rosa slumps against the cabin wall, realizing that any efforts will, at best, amuse her mistress. There isn't any way of getting out of this. She won't have a choice in the matter. The best she can do is shut up and endure this with dignity. Rosa stays pointedly limp as Mindfang nuzzles her neck softly and runs her fingertips up and down her arms. "Shhht Pet, shhh, good girl."

Swallowing dryly, Rosa does her best to keep from crying. How did she think this was going to turn out okay? How could she be so damn naive? She was bought by a pirate, what did she expect?

"My poor little pet." Mindfang kisses her again, this time carefully drawing her lower lip into her mouth and nipping it softly. The kiss endures for a good three minutes, Mindfang kissing her passionately and Rosa struggling to maintain her composure. It's hard to keep her hands folded in her lap because, quite frankly, she's in serious danger of enjoying this. She wants to kiss this woman. Is it really such a bad thing? It probably is, but right now she just wants to give in and get it over with. Partially to avoid violence and partially because of how aroused she is. But giving into her advances means accepting her servitude as well as the losing the virginity she's managed to hold on to for more than twenty sweeps now.

Eventually, though, Mindfang lets up, her lips trailing down the side of Rosa's neck. When she lingers at her collarbone long enough to leave a bruise, Rosa decides to calm down and enjoy herself. She's just settling in to accept things when her mistress slips off of her and returns to her chair. Rosa's shocked and a little too disappointed. Mindfang is smirking like a champion and very intentionally crosses her legs.

Mindfang looks incredibly smug and Rosa can't blame her. She wants to blame her, wants to glare and inform her how rude she's been by not requesting permission to violate her personal bubble. Of course she's relieved that nothing more than a kiss was expected of her, but if the woman's going to be all over her like that, she should have the decency to live up to it. But she can't help the fact that she just wants to crawl off of the bed into Mindfang's lap and let herself be cosseted for hours because oh god she hasn't been touched in god knows when. She'd forgotten how good it felt to be caressed. Or maybe she'd never learned to begin with? Either way, she feels like she needs a fan and a basin of ice to cool off her face.

Oh dear, she's probably looking at her Mistress with a ridiculously love-struck puppy eyes even though she's barely crossed the border into mildly affectionate. She hasn't had much experience with anything beyond a bit of illicit flirting and this is... well... it's all a bit too flattering and a bit too fast for her comfort.

So instead of doing anything sensible, like offering to polish the floor of the cabin or cleaning the portholes or even apologizing profusely for her behavior, she lays there on her side and stares unabashedly. Mindfang stares back until the tension in the room builds to the point that they're both starting to turn a little warm in the cheeks.
"Are you hungry?" She asks, finally breaking the silence, sounding a little embarassed. "You look half starved."

Rosa nods, and sits up slowly, propping herself on her hands. She's a little shaky and it's terrible and wonderful at the same time.

"I want to absolutely devour you, Pet." Mindfang mutters offhandedly before passing her the dinner tray. "You've only been here for two hours and I already want to--"

She notices Rosa's nervous, frightened stare and trails off. "Darling, relax. I'm not going to hurt you."

"Thank you, Mistress. I appreciate your good intentions." She says, laying out a few slices of cheese onto a slice of thick, fluffy bread. Mindfang pours her another glass of wine which is a terrible idea, and Rosa starts to eat with more rapidly than could ever be considered polite. It's the only thing she has to cover her nervousness.

"I do apologize," She coughs, softly, swallowing too large of a mouthful. "But I can't recall the last time I've eaten anything passable."

"Don't say that I'll start crying." Mindfang does actually look rather upset, her eyes widening enough to make her look soft and innocent around the edges. Then, before Rosa has a chance to go 'oh, no, darling, don't look like that, your pretty eyes', she's smirking and looks every inch of the pirate Captain she was when she first stepped through the door.

"You're the picture of perfection, if a little skinny, and while you're vastly cleverer than expected you should hardly be handcuffed to a wall and spanked. Although in a different context that would be an exquisite experience--"

Rosa starts to choke on her wine. It burns as it goes down her throat and her eyes begin watering furiously. Her gaze is wide and taken aback and Mindfang chuckles wickedly at the sight.

"Darling, you're acting like you've never--"

Rosa's flushing again. She knows the shade isn't visible but it has to be impossible to miss the sudden change in hue.

"Oh, my dear." Mindfang looks exaggeratedly scandalized, her eyes wide with shock. She flutters her hand in front of her face and pretends to be gasping for air. Someone should tell her she's stumbled into the wrong career path-- the number of facades she's assumed in the past eight minutes alone are worthy of the imperial globe theater. "Either you're younger than I thought or you've been living in a cave most of your life."

"The latter is closest to the truth, Mistress."

"Oh my god." She sat back in her chair arching her eyebrows. "So you mean to say that no one has..." She paused. "I'm trying to find a way to be polite about this."

"Mistress, if I could be quite honest-- no matter how you phrase it, the answer will be yes." She's blushing even more now, the color spreading up from her neck into her face.

"Well, well, well..." She says with a bit of a Cheshire smirk. "I suppose that's good news, hmm?"

Rosa doesn't know how to reply so she settles for turning back to her lunch. The food is remarkably good for ship's fare and she's reasonably sure she's being spoiled right now. She knows that this is probably some manner of inducing her trust and affection but she appreciates it all the same. A little
bit of humane kindness never hurt anyone and she hasn't had anything halfway palatable to digest in, well, eons. And while her taste buds might be a little rusty, she knows decent food when she sees it. Well, smells it rather. Or is it tastes it?

"Do you want some more wine, Pet?" Mindfang asks, softly, holding up the bottle. Rosa wants more wine but knows she should know better but before she can say 'no thank you Mistress', she's nodding and the glass is half-full.

They both eat in silence, Mindfang sitting back in her chair as if she's comfortable in a theater and Rosa is the headline act. She wants to do something to acknowledge the attention-- play the coquette, flirt, bat her eyelashes, do something alluring, but the very thought of interacting makes her seize up like a goldfish out of water. The wine isn't helping much either, making her more inclined to giggle hysterically at every thought that passes through her head.

Like, for example, the fact that she's ended up at sea, sitting across the room from one of the ocean's more feared and, needless to say, attractive pirates. She wasn't supposed to end up at sea, she was supposed to remain safely ensconced an average of eighteen feet below the planet's surface looking after newborns until she got so weak from old age they ate her alive while she was making her rounds. That was a dignified death. That was an honorable death. An honorable death was anything but whatever death she was on the course for. At least now she was going to go out with a bit of fun, it seemed like.

"Well, now that this has become suitably awkward for the evening, I think I'm going to retire." Mindfang's still smirking but it's a little more sweetly that Rosa had expected. She looks seconds away from kissing her again but there's a queer sort of affection present there and Rosa's heart starts to clench and beat faster. She blushes brightly and stares at her hands folded in her lap.

Mindfang seems to notice her discomfort and laughs softly. She gets to her feet slowly, carefully straightening her clothing. She looks impeccable already but Rosa still wants to get up and help her arrange everything, smooth out the frizz in her hair and re-do the buttons she's done up incorrectly. But it's hard to stir herself; it's hard to think about what the implications are in that sort of thing. "I'd extend an invitation, but I don't think you'd take that well, my darling little thing."

"Not quite that drunk." Rosa says before she can stop herself, staring pointedly at the ceiling to avoid giving her blood color away too prematurely. She's going to be found out sooner or later but there's something in her that makes her hope it'll be later. She doesn't even want to know what color Mindfang is beneath her skin but she does know because there's no way she can have eyes like that and not be blue-blooded.

Mindfang laughs, thankfully, tucking her rum bottle under her arm. In the starlight streaming in from the portholes her hair looks like mirror-polished obsidian. Rosa dreamily wonders if it's half as soft as it looks but then shakes off the thought like an unwanted cobweb. "Getting there, though, darling?"

"Yes." She says with a rush of guilt and slight panic because oh goodness she shouldn't be drinking. But her mistress wants her to be drinking, doesn't she? This is getting more than a little bewildering and her brain feels like it's wreathed in smoke and--

Still smiling with a degree of warmth and affection that Rosa can barely understand, Mindfang leans toward her and presses her lips to her forehead. It's a gesture that makes her heart stop pounding with it's chasteness. She smells like expensive perfume and sea air and just a little like something sweet and delicate.

"I see we're going to have to work on your alcohol tolerance, Pet." Mindfang says with a wicked grin, "You're only halfway through the bottle."
"Well, if this is to become a common occurrence, Mistress, then, yes please." Rosa says, blinking twice and rubbing her hands across her cheeks.

With a sinuous swing of her hips and a sashay towards the cabin door, Mindfang turns to smirk at her. "Ohhhhhhh, trust me Pet. It will be."

The second the door slams shut Rosa collapses onto the bed once more. The wine bottle is still sitting on the nightstand and the moonlight glints through the glass bottle in a way that's almost indescribably fascinating. She lets out a long, low groan and forces herself to sit up because she wants to drink until she forgets all of this.

So she does. She fills her glass to the rim and downs it in a few gulps and she's feeling warm and fuzzy in the best way and with the next glass her insides feel like liquid velvet and with the last of the bottle she falls back onto the bed, emotionally drained, full of adrenaline and seconds away from giving up all hope of deciphering just what in god's name is occurring and bursting into tears.

Thankfully, however, she falls asleep before any of that can occur. Her last thought is of how glad she is that she hasn't been chained up in the hold because being all wrapped up in a feather duvet with food in her stomach and her feet warm is quite possible the best outcome she'd ever allowed herself to contemplate, even in her most outlandish fantasies.

This, she thinks, is rather nice.
or, oh my god why won't the floor stop moving

Chapter Summary

Hangovers are the worst. Especially when the pirate won't stop rubbing it in. Or flirting with you.

(otherwise known is: what the hell is going on and shouldn't I be cleaning something, really?)

When she wakes up in the morning, she's curled up in a little ball at the end of the bed. Her head is pounding like a symphony solely composed of drums, her skull the bass drum and her blood the drumstick thumping strongly against the metal rim of her-- this metaphor is making her feel even worse. She closes her eyes and lets out a pained groan. It's hard to remember where she is. The room feels like it's rocking back and forth and she just wants to curl up under the bed and hide away from the rest of the world.

Everything around her smells stale, and her eyes burn as she forces them open. As far as things go, she feels like she's hungover. But that's probably because she is-- oh god it's all coming back to her like an unexpected tidal wave. The pirate-- the pirate who bought her-- the woman in the boots with the coat, a decent meal for the first time in her memory and oh god she'd polished off an entire bottle of wine on her own, that was terrible and--

Someone is knocking. What? She lifts her head from the nest she made in the duvet and stares at the door, wide eyed. What does she do? What does she do!? She doesn't want to have company when she's like this, she must look an absolute sigh--t but she supposes she doesn't have a choice about this, really, now does she?

"Come in?" She tries to say as deferentially as possible but it comes out as "grumblemumblein" instead. The door opens and the shafts of sunlight that pierce into the cabin make her hiccup with shock.

"Awwww, my poor little thing." Mindfang croons because of course it's the attractive pirate. This annoys her for some reason. If she comes over here, Rosa can't be responsible for her actions, because she may or may not still be drunk.

She lifts her head even further and says, as clearly as she can, "I do apologize, Madame, but I'm in quite the sorry state this morning. How may I be of assistance?"

"Dunno." Mindfang arches an eyebrow and smirks. She's not buying this. Rosa can't blame her. "Make me some coffee for my hangover and then prepare a six course brunch?"

"Of course, Mistress. I'd be more than happy to." She mumbles and then rolls out of bed, or at least tries to but instead she slumps onto the floor in a pile of blankets. She can't currently find it in her to be alarmed by this situation. "Oh dear. That might have to wait."

"Darling, did you finish that entire bottle?" Mindfang's still standing in the doorway, backlit by sunshine refracting off a raucous ocean, but as she notices Rosa struggling to keep her eyes open she closes it and steps inside.
"Entirely possibly. I don't recall. Is it empty?"

"Yes. I would say it is very empty. I'm not surprised you're hungover."

"I'm not hungover I'm just feeling a little under the weather. Perhaps I'm a bit seasick?"

"You drank an entire bottle of wine and you're not a habitual consumer. If you're not hungover than I am impressed. Very impressed." She says this with a note of dubious pride, denoting that this is, in fact, a compliment. Given pirate stereotypes, it probably is one.

"Could you make the room stop moving?" Rosa groans instead of saying anything sensible, like continuing to assert that she's 100% sober. She's torn between finding the strength of will to pull herself to her feet and get back in bed, and the desire to ask for assistance. Mindfang makes this battle far easier by huffing, stepping across the room, and scooping her up into her arms with a deft motion that makes Rosa's breath stop. It's not the warmth of having another person close to her-- she spent an undisclosed amount of time for sale at a dubiously legal slave market, she's used to close quarters. But rather it's the smell of clean skin, damp clothes, a floral fragrance unnatural to slaving slums or oceangoing vessels-- the sudden, sense-cloying embrace of good things.

Mindfang sets her back on the bed and pulls the blankets back up over her before taking a seat on the mattress beside her. The entire maneuver takes about ten seconds, conducted in a manner-of-fact way that gives Rosa the distinct impression that it was for Mindfang's benefit rather than her own. She considers this for a moment, then decides it doesn't bother her. The bed is a much nicer place than the (given the evidence) long-unscrubbed floor. Rosa buries her head into the pillow and closes her eyes. In concession to her social standing, she turns her face to the side so that Mindfang can see it. As much as she wants to do this properly and mind her place, she really is too hung over for words. You're very attentive, I appreciate that, Rosa wants to say to Mindfang, but making words is impossible. But she wouldn't be lying-- the woman really is quite attentive, even if not for magnanimous reasons. As she lies there, still feeling like she's several sheets to the wind, a hand makes its way across her forehead and brushes away her hair. She feels a little better. Her touch is cool. Rosa doesn't shy away.

"I can't, darling, we're on a boat." Mindfang murmurs, patting her shoulder reassuringly. "Rest assured though, Pet, things aren't normally quite this rocky, we've just hit a patch of rough."

There's that term again, Pet, Pet like she's an owned animal, a creature that sleeps before the fire waiting for someone to come and pay attention to her. She wants to lift up her head and inform Mindfang that she's hardly an animal and doesn't like being treated as such, that she's prefer to be beaten and thrown into the dungeon instead of dealing with the indignity of being kept as someone's Pet-- no matter how attractive her new Mistress is. That, however, seems inadvisable, not matter how intoxicated she was/is/has been.

"I don't like it." She grumbles, realizing a little too late that she shouldn't be voicing such sentiments aloud because goodness knows what Mindfang would do-- she probably would beat her and throw her into the hold. As much as she hates being treated like a dog, she's rather sure it's far preferable to being thrashed.

She opens a cautious eye to gauge Mindfang's reaction. Her throat tightens and her hands start to shake. Mindfang's looking at her a little queerly. She's got an eyebrow arched and the corner of her mouth is quirking down and her posture straightens just a little. The warmth of her demeanor seems to be blown away by the breeze she can see whipping in the sails and, suddenly, it's not so nice having her so close. But the hand caressing her forehead keeps going just as gently as it was minutes ago.
"Well, I'm sorry, but you don't have much of a choice." She says, her voice low. It sounds like a reprimand and an apology rolled up into a sentence. Rosa's not sure that they're talking about the same thing. The ship, her nickname, her enslavement-- all of the above? But she knows that none of it is about to change because Mindfang's not lying, she doesn't have a choice at all.

And then she feels more nauseous than she ever had before. She doesn't vomit, thankfully, because that would be devastatingly degrading, but she does have to close her eyes and a quiet sort of keen ekes from her throat. Mindfang is genteel enough not to acknowledge it verbally, but she does stop stroking her face long enough to let her catch her breath once more.

"That's not very nice, Mistress." She murmurs, trying her best to keep her tone light and respectful. Joviality seems to be the best sort of tone to maintain because it hurts too much to be anything but cheerful.

Mindfang chuckles and arches her head back to stare up at the ceiling. An unspoken tension is rising in the air the longer she remains silent, stroking Rosa's face. It's beginning to make Rosa's skin crawl-- didn't Mindfang come in here for a reason? But she doesn't say anything for a few moments. Her hair falls over her shoulders in a gorgeous mass of ebony curls. The ends of them brush her pillow and she catches the faintest whiff of stale salt air.

Finally she lets out a soft, luxuriant sigh and swings her hair over her shoulder, back out of Rosa's face. "Oh, my. Someone's got a bit of lip, hrmnn?" She purrs, like there is absolutely nothing wrong. Rosa considers this.

"I have two of them, in fact." Rosa replies with a hazy smile. Mindfang sounds pleased-- not happy, not delighted, but pleased and for now that's good enough to be of comfort to her drunken mind.

"Mmmmm I'm well aware. You kiss like a champion." Mindfang chuckles, arching her eyebrows and turning her blue lightning gaze onto Rosa's. In the light streaming through the portholes, she knows her own eye color must be refracting a shade of chrysoprase green, but it's hard to care. They're at sea and the worst that could happen is she'll be blackmailed and, to be quite frank, she's already fucked so it can't get much worse.

Rosa wants to tell her that she wasn't aware that kissing was a competition, but suddenly that doesn't seem like a very good idea. Mindfang's smirk at her and Rosa feels like she's under the mesmerizing gaze of a feline predator once more. Or perhaps she means serpentine predator-- isn't it cobras that blind their prey? She supposes that she shouldn't be looking Mindfang straight in the eyes like this, anyways.

But it's flattering to have her look at you. She makes you feel like the most beautiful creature on the high seas and that she's moments away from easing you back onto the mattress and kissing you until you can't remember where your body starts and hers begins.

Mindfang's not doing that right now, though. Her smile is still present, but it's starting to fade and she's looking a little more serious. Her serious stare is just as chilling as her alluring one, though, because her serious gaze makes her eyes go a blue deeper than a tempest tossed sea.

"My darling little Pet," Mindfang says, her voice gentle but her tone ever-so-firm. "I think we need to have a little chat, if you don't mind too terribly."

It's not a request by any means, but she phrases it so beautifully it feels like one. 'Chat' is not a casual word. No one uses that word casually. It's always 'we need to have a little chat about you harboring an illegal baby, being in dereliction of your duties and leading a social revolution'. Never 'we need to have a little chat about how nicely the garden is getting along'. She sits up slowly, quelling a wave of
nervousness and ill-feeling. This is it, isn't it? This is when this bemusing twilight of the past few hours evaporates and she'll be moved into the dungeon or whatever you call it when you're aboard a ship-- brig, that's it.

"Don't look so scared." Mindfang says, her voice going even softer around the edges. Rosa doesn't trust it, eyes narrowing just a fraction. She trails a hand down Rosa's cheek once more but she doesn't smile. "I'll give you a little while to perk up, hmm? I'll send someone to bring you up to me in an hour. Is that going to be okay?"

"Yes, Mistress." She murmurs, dropping her eyes to the ground and remembering her manners for the first time that morning. Her stomach has long since sunk to the bottom of the ship and is now making a valiant effort to reach the seabed.

Mindfang does smile at that and rises, elegantly, from the bed. "I'll have someone bring you breakfast, hmm?"

That makes her gag.

"Or, all things considered-" Mindfang says, raising her eyebrows and smirking softly. "A cup of coffee?"

* * *

Mindfang slips from the room without so much as a secondary reassurance of 'you're fine, dear, don't worry', closing the door tightly behind her. It doesn't lock which is a good, albeit confusing sign, until Rosa recollects they're out to sea and there's no place to escape to so instead of 'trusting kindness' it could be 'well-laid trap to test her intelligence'. She swings her legs onto the floor and self-consciously smooths her hair. As she rises to her feet her nausea comes back. It's the farthest thing from pleasant but she has to fix herself up because she doesn't want to go into the marauding lion-viper's den without preparing as well as she can. She's known Mindfang less than a day, but it's abundantly obvious that the woman has a libido. The chances of looking nice substantially impacting the outcome of this... 'chat' are negotiable. But it won't hurt.

But she doesn't have a mirror so that's hardly going to happen. The door is unlocked so she could always wander outside and see if one of the men could assist her but...

No that wouldn't be proper. Or wise. So she spends the interim until the confrontation staring, vacantly, at the ceiling. She's not looking forward to this at all and she'd lied, she's hungover. She's hungover as all hell. She'll never drink again.

Ugh, never mind. She wants more wine. She can't make it through this sober, despite sobriety getting her through far worse things in the past thirty-odd years. She thought she could yesterday, before she'd remembered how great it felt to be quite solidly drunk, like all of her insides had been upholstered with velvet. It's not a very mature or particularly healthy way to deal with her inner turmoil, but it's a way to make it go away long enough for her to take a deep breath and smile. It's how she got through the first twenty years of her adult life, trapped underground in the breeding caverns.

However, 'getting drunk' isn't really much of a viable option right now, so she opts for doing what she's done for years now and drowning her feelings in an ocean of meaningless thoughts and domestic debris. The bed needs to be made, she should really wash that wineglass and find a way to clean the porthole and get a little more light in here. Some flowers would really spruce up the space--

"Captain will see you now."
See how fast that passed the time? But as she swallows she feels every un-thought minute of panic flooding back into her veins. Oh goodness she's not sure if she can handle this. What would happen if she starts crying? Would she be hung? Would that make Mindfang angry? Because she seems quite... affectionate but perhaps it's only because she wants to get her into bed. Perhaps crying will destroy any appeal she has in her Mistress's eyes. But maybe that's not the case. Perhaps she's here to do manual labor instead of perform acts of pleasure. Although she really would prefer to-- no she wouldn't prefer that. It's better to keep her pride than to be comfortable. Isn't it? Isn't it? She frowns. Oh dear.

"Miss. The Captain will see you now." The sailor standing in her doorway repeats and she jolts to her feet with a panicked gasp that has him immediately apologizing for startling her.

When she slips out of the cabin door, she knows what she's going to see. After all, a ship at sail can't be that much different than a ship at port. And she'd seen the whole thing when she'd boarded the first time-- hadn't she? But as she looks around she starts to realize that, perhaps, her memory is a little faulty. Because although the poor thing probably has seen better days, in the full light of day it's beautiful. The wood gleams in the soft way that well-conditioned lumber always does, and there's not a single thing out of place. Ropes are artfully secured, sailors are minding their posts and none of the sails bear so much as a patch. While there's signs of wear everywhere, there's nothing out on deck that she can find to criticize.

And the ocean, oh heavens the ocean. It sparkles like nothing she's ever seen before, the blue of the waves shimmering like the world's most iridescent fabric and capped with foam that's so white it looks like clouds. She's in love at first sight. She feels herself straying, unconsciously, towards the deck railing. Her companion clears his throat and she stops but oh dear does she want to go over there and stare.

"This is a lovely ship." She says to her escort, attempting to hide her embarrassment by giving him a smile. "You all have done a lovely job maintaining it."

"She's a beauty," The sailor replies, correcting her pointedly in that way of sailors everywhere. "Captain keeps her in mint condition, won't let a scratch get on her baby."

He chuckles in a way that's clearly reminiscent of affection. It's a sound that comforts Rosa just a little. She's passably sure he's the same man who purchased her yesterday, although those memories are almost entirely blotted out by anxious confusion. The man yesterday was nice, and tried to warn her. Surely he'd warn her now if she was on the precipice of hell?

He guides her across the deck with a gentle hand at her elbow, clearly unwilling to let her wander off once more. Although he doesn't seem nervous or afraid, he does seem rather urgent. She picks up the pace to match his because even though it strikes her as unnecessary-- how far away can they really be? But no, they're not that far. The door to the Captain's quarters is just beneath the bridge, sentinelled by two blue glass lanterns. The door is ornately carved and while the detailing is a little dusty it's still gorgeous. Rosa wholeheartedly approves, and wants to spend the day running her fingers over it. She can see that there used to be paint there, and she wonders if that's a project she can do.

There's a knocker inset there, a brass spider whose patina has been almost totally eradicated by a greenish tarnish, probably from the salt air. There's a pair of sapphires in its eyes and they need a good shining but... wonderful taste. Very nautical. She approves completely.

"Captain's waiting for you." He says with a slight bow of the head. "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Miss. If you need anything else, please let me know."
After a long pause, she finally says, softly, "Thank you for your assistance."

And then before she can say anything embarrassing like 'am I going to die?' he's knocked on the Captain's door for her. And then her Mistress has purred, "Come in, darling" and she's stepping through the door he opens for her.

* * *

Mindfang's quarters are breathtaking. In need of a deep cleaning, but impressive nonetheless. The floors are hewn from a rich, dark wood that carries up the walls and onto the ceiling. Everything is wood, dark and rich and almost masculine-- except for the fact that everywhere she looks there's almost frivolous detail. The chair before the fire? Upholstered in blue damask. The desk? Carved with floral finials with a crystal vase of beautiful blue chrysanthemums that seem out of place on a pirate ship. The rug beneath her feet is plush and almost ostentatiously eastern, a mixture of blues and purples, crimsons and golds that brings color into the room. Mindfang's bed, recessed into the wall to the right of the entrance, is partially hidden by a heavy curtain of blue velvet, tied back with a frayed gold rope. The mattress is piled high with blankets, duvets and quilts, each one of them a shade of blue. It's clearly a running theme.

Despite the innate beauty of the objects, however, there's signs of neglect everywhere. That's what unnerves her. While the ship outside is worn, it's in beautiful condition. The damage outside is expected for a place that's continually exposed to the most brutal of the elements. What can be fixed and maintained despite the damage has been done to a level of exacting perfection that Rosa admires. Mindfang's quarters aren't worn down or bruised. They're forgotten, like a painting left in a garden shed to rot, remembered only when the canvas is so blackened it would take a team of experts years to restore the paint underneath. The floor needs a good scrubbing and the mirrors could use a polish. Who knows the last time she did laundry, considering the amount of clothing strewn about. The rug looks like it's never been beaten out and the bed really should be made, the sheets crumpled and hanging off the bed. The bookshelves behind her desk are in an complete disarray and the pair of windowed doors leading out on what looks to be a balcony have a few cracked panes in them and what remains is covered in fingerprints.

It's almost depressing. A woman who'll expend so much energy tending to her ship but won't take the initiative to make her own little living space comfortable. Perhaps that's why Rosa was purchased? Rosa perks up at that thought. She can do that. She can clean and mend and maintain, that's easy. She can understand that. Sex is harder, and much less palatable.

Mindfang's sitting at her desk, reading over a letter with her gorgeous, glimmering eyes narrowed critically at whatever's contained within. A cast off envelope is on the floor beside the desk, the purple wax seal cracked in half. She's anxiously tapping her pen on the desktop and, from beneath it, Rosa can hear the echo of a boot heel tapping on wood.

"Close the door, Pet." She says absently, glancing up from her reading and gesturing with her pen. Ink goes flying. She doesn't notice. Rosa turns to do asked but it's harder to do so than she thought it would be. She's closing herself in-- she's doing it to herself-- Mindfang's not locking the door and chaining her up, she's not being forced into a closet or dragged to the hold. But she's still a prisoner because she'll do as she's told. She's locking herself in. Her hand shakes as she finally takes the handle into her grasp and twists, closing the door without so much as a 'thud'. She guides the handle back into place and breathes deeply, through her nose. Then, habitually, she smooths her dress and turns to face her captor once more.

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Mindfang slips her letter into the desk. Rosa hears the click of a key in a lock and flinches without meaning to. The captain's key ring jingles as she slips it back into her coat and Rosa watches the glint
of the metal with the eyes of a woman habitually desperate for her freedom. She has no plans to escape but it never hurts to take note of things around you. Escape would require her desiring to be somewhere else.

"Feeling better, Pet?" Mindfang asks, softly, giving her a slow once-over. Rosa clearly looks less than palatable in the light of day, because Mindfang's face scrunches up momentarily, eyebrows arching like exclamation marks for the barest eighth of a second. Instinctively, Rosa wraps her arms around herself as if the cover of her bare arms can shelter her.

Rosa nods, not trusting herself to speak because damnitall there it is again, Pet, like she's a cockatiel and it makes her feel sick all over again.

"Hrmm..." And of course there's something about nodding instead of speaking that displeases her too. She pushes her chair back with a ear-wrenching scrape of wood on wood, and slips around the desk in a few carefully-placed footfalls. Before Rosa can skitter away, Mindfang is guiding Rosa over to the armchair and muttering something about her looking too pale.

It would be endearing if it weren't for the fact that her hand lingers a little too long at her waist and she finishes the complaint with an affectionate caress to her hair and a whispered, 'I can't have you getting sick, now can I darling?' that's far too familiar given their twelve hour acquaintance. She sits in the chair with some relief all the same. Mindfang's right, she really isn't feeling too well.

"So, darling," Mindfang murmurs, smiling encouragingly as Rosa finally steadies her nerves long enough to make eye contact. The smile in and of itself isn't at all sinister, but the fact that the captain is so condescending, friendly like she's trying to coax a small animal out of its den, makes her immediately feel like rebelling. Nope, not coming out. Rosa doesn't look away though because eye contact is a luxury. Being treated like a sentient being is a luxury. You don't make eye contact with the scared kitten you're coaxing in out of the rain.

"Yes, Mistress?" She finally says, trying to sound as sure of herself as is possible given the rollicking in her stomach. She wants to be ill. Violently ill. But that's hardly decorous, now is it, and she's still trying to make a good impression.

Mindfang reaches out and brushes her hair away from her forehead. She looks almost regretful which is odd because what does she have to regret? "Rosa, I think we need to have a little discussion about your role here on my little ship."

"I think that would be wise, Mistress." She says demurely, rubbing at the bandages on her wrists. So it's a discussion, now? Hmph.

Mindfang grins and rests her hands on the arms of the chair, effectively pinning her in. It's a passive gesture, in theory, but it still asserts dominance so strongly that Rosa feels like she should protest it. Rosa wants to be standing again NOW because then they'd be on equal footing, but that isn't about to happen. She's too scared.

"I think I'm going to keep you," Mindfang says in a voice that's low and seductive as she leans in so close Rosa can breathe in her perfume. Her tone is such that Rosa almost feels like she's being let in on something that no one else will ever know, a secret shared between the two of them.

Seeing that Rosa isn't about to cut and run, Mindfang curls one of her hands around Rosa's neck, dragging her thumb across her lips. Rosa, dazed, remembering the evening before, feels her lips part, willingly. Mindfang's grin is purely predatory. "I think I'm going to keep you because you are absolutely delightful."
"Thank you Mistress." She breathes, her voice shaking slightly as she tries to keep herself from flushing. She seems to dedicated to making Rosa self-conscious, throwing praise at her every other direction. And it's not condescendingly spoken, ether. Mindfang's addressing her in a matter of fact fashion she's not used to hearing. It's jarring to have the woman who bought her, of all things, talking to her like she's clever enough to understand, and not bothering to make any of this optional. Going to. She's going to. She's not even trying to disguise any of it. Between the flattery and the closeness, Rosa's too off balance to argue back.

Mindfang sinks to her knees beside the chair, face so close to Rosa's own that if she turns her head aside she could kiss her, lips brushing together like the feathers of a bird through the air. Rosa's hands tighten around the skirt of her dress and then she takes a deep, deep breath. She starts to fidget with the bindings around her wrists and wishes for a fraction of a moment that there was something there once more to remind her of her position. Because with Mindfang doing her best to hypnotize her and the ship doing its best to discombobulate her, she's finding it more than easy to forget that she's a slave. Even as she is implicitly told so.

"And I think I'm going to keep you because I do earnestly believe I would enjoy your... companionship," said with a smirk and another once over that makes Rosa turn several shades of green for what feels like the hundredth time today. Mindfang's fingers slip around her neck, stroking it until Rosa relaxes into the touch, arching her neck and turning into it. It feels indecently good. So good that when the fingers curl around her jaw and twist her head so that she's facing Mindfang, she doesn't protest at all.

"And I think I'm keeping you because I want to." She says as she pulls Rosa so close their lips could be touching. Rosa, breathing hard, barely has the patience to wait for what she knows is coming next. Keeping herself from kissing her is like trying to walk an unmannerly dog-- she's keeping hold of the leash but her shoulders are going to be wrenched from their sockets before too long. Mindfang doesn't leave her to suffer for long. The kiss is long, slow and deep, one of Mindfang's hands curled around the back of her neck while the other curls around her thigh. Rosa forgetting herself enough that she whines, moving in closer. Only when Mindfang's touch begins to trace too far up her thigh for comfort does she recollect her senses, shying away. Mindfang, to her bewilderment, doesn't immediately release her. The hand curled around her neck keeps her in places, but the offending hand does retreat which is a small comfort. Still, the spell is broken. When Mindfang finally breaks the kiss, Rosa pulls away, affronted. She's gratified to see that Mindfang looks annoyed.

Still, she doesn't rebuke her. Thwarted, then. Not angry.

How do you respond to that? How do you say anything to any of that? Yes, make me yours! No, let me go! I need to be free? I don't know what to say? Help me oh god help me I'm so scared, I'm so alone? Because she is. But she can't say any of those things because, really, what good would it do? So she swallows everything that's hitting her, like a sack of bricks dropped onto her skull, and instead smiles.

Because, really, what can she do but ride this out and hope to high heaven this isn't going to turn out badly for her.

"That sounds perfectly acceptable, Mistress. Is there anything in particular that I can do for you?"

Mindfang looks affronted at this, as if Rosa has somehow changed the subject. Was she expecting her to disagree? Hardly. She didn't have much of a choice in this, now did she? Considering Mindfang's non-subtle attempts to seduce her into complaisance, this can't have been an unwanted answer.

She slips around to the front of the chair once more and moves in, so close that the hem of her
ridiculous coat is brushing against the bare skin of Rosa's calves.

Mindfang is close, too close after her last invasive attention-- and she wants to get out of the chair and dive over the edge of the ship into the depths of the ocean. But she's entranced like a fly in a well-woven web of honeyed words and steel-strong silk. Mindfang broaches the gap between them and kisses her softly, this time, and Rosa can't bring herself to fight. It's nice. Very nice. For an affection starved woman without any previous physical relationships to speak of, this is nothing short of siege tactics.

Mindfang pulls away and fixes her with a smile. Rosa lets out a soft 'oh' because oh dear that was quite lovely. She meets the Marquise's gaze for the first time since it started to hit her what she's been signed up for and the air flies from her lungs like it's fleeing from the Empress's executioners. Mindfang's going to own her more quickly than she can remember to fight.

"So darling," She breathes, darling curling off of her tongue as if it's a caress. Her eyebrows quirk up like two arches, byzantine and beautiful against the ethereal paleness of her skin. "Are you going to be mine?"

'Yes' she wants to scream, 'yes, yes, oh GOD yes make me yours' because she wants that when she's looking into her eyes, those beautiful blue eyes that hold so much more color than her own that are so muted of a green even she herself mistakes them for gray sometimes. But the word just won't tip over her tongue. It's at the precipice, balanced to make the leap but she can't force it, she can't. She wants to serve, she needs to serve, she can't go on having nothing but herself because she needs to do something to forget and oh god she needs it-- but-- but-- she can't-- and-- oh god--

"I need to go." Rosa chokes out instead of the 'yes' she wants to whimper out. Mindfang's eyes jolt open and her flirtatious bravado flickers. She's showing her teeth now and those fangs they're just perfect--

"I'm sorry," She says, eyes narrowing, arms planting on either side of the armchair like iron bars. "But you're mine now, and I can't allow it."

Ah yes, there it is and Rosa can breathe again because she knew it, she knew it. She might have a fighting chance. But she still feels like the room is spinning and her body is rebelling and--

"I need to-- oh god--" She's going to be ill, she's going to be profusely ill and she doesn't want to be but she can't keep up like this--

And Mindfang understands now, her face registering a split second of panic before moving to action. She is a sailor, after all, and it shows in how quickly she's able to get Rosa out onto the balcony and doesn't say a word as Rosa is violently ill over the edge of the ship. Mindfang smooths her hair from her face and when she starts to shiver, rather courteously retrieves a blanket from her quarters to wrap around her.

"Better, Pet?" She asks, softly, when Rosa finally stops heaving. She nods and sinks down to her knees, gratefully breathing in the fresh salt air. There's nothing left in her system now, she knows that. Some of the sick feeling has left with it, the objections her worries-- all she wants to do is sink into the comforting knowledge that all she has to do is what she's told and nothing more. She can do that. She really, really can.

Mindfang makes a concerned noise and slips back into her room once more, returning with a crystal tumbler full of water. Pressing it into Rosa's hands she kneels before her and frets quietly.

"Poor thing," She coos softly, pulling the blanket a little tighter around her. "You really aren't a
drinker, are you?"

"Seasick." Rosa responds as a way of rebuttal but she doesn't sound convincing. The air out here is bracing and it soothes her heated skin, flushed from arousal and fear. Mindfang simply kneels there watching her. It's making her a little self-conscious because what can she be thinking, Rosa frets. "I am so sorry, Mistress-"

"Happens all the time." She days dismissively, shrugging it off as if it truly isn't anything. What, people vomiting off your ship or women rejecting your advances? Rosa doesn't ask, but wants to. "Anything else left?"

"Nothing whatsoever." She says with a short laugh. Mindfang rolls her eyes and gets to her feet, reaching down for Rosa. She extends a hand for Mindfang to grab but--

Mindfang bends down and sweeps her into her arms, lifting Rosa up off of the deck like she's nothing more than a coil of rope. Again. Second time today. It's shocking and her heart jolts and her chest goes tight. Despite the relative innocence of the gesture, it feels wrong. She can walk. She can do this-- this is wrong, she doesn't want to be carried like this--

Mindfang carries her into the room, ignoring Rosa's protestations that she's perfectly capable of walking, she's simply suffering from a momentary bout of seasickness combined with the negative after effects of binge drinking, PUT DOWN-- Before Rosa can fully comprehend what's occurring, Mindfang has dropped her on her bed, on HER BED, and is pulling the blankets up over her shoulders. Rosa sits up almost immediately and tries to climb back out. For one thing, it isn't very proper, and for another, she's not sure she trusts Mindfang's intentions at all but Mindfang immediately shoves her back onto the pillows.

"Shhht." She says, running her fingers across her forehead. "Shhht, stop fussing, stop fussing. You won't do yourself any good by being soooooooo ridiculous, hmm?"

Rosa tries to sit up again but Mindfang's glare is strong enough to keep her from fulfilling her intention. Her glare isn't nearly as compelling as her smile but she still quakes underneath it. There's something off-putting about that seven-pointed eye of hers that Rosa's going to need time to reconcile herself to. "But I'm only--I'm going to be fine-- I'm just-- I didn't mean-- I'm so sorry--"

"It takes a while to get used to being on a ship, darling." Mindfang looks more irritated than concerned at this point, smoothing the covers over her with a gesture borne out of habit. "Don't keep apologizing. Honestly," she mutters, "it's not like you can help it, huh?"

She shrugs and fidgets beneath the sheets, her fingers curling around the silk of the fabric. "I--"

"And for fuck's sake just calm down a little, okay?" She says, cutting Rosa off with a harsh sigh. "I think we established the fact that I'm not about to beat you senseless."

Feeling like a small child being reprimanded for her forgetfulness, Rosa nods. Mindfang rolls her eyes-- god that's bizarre to watch-- and sinks onto the mattress beside her. She keeps up the pseudo-affectionate gesture of stroking her hair and Rosa is soothed by it in a way she would rather not be. She doesn't want to be petted like a housecat but, well, it does feel nice.

"So long as you listen to me, my darling little Pet, I don't expect we'll have any problems whatsoever, hmm? Just be a good girl."

Her hand trails from her hair to her jawline and then down across her neck. Her thumb starts to make soft circles around her temple and that feels nice too, less like she's being cosseted and more like
Mindfang's trying to be close to her too.

"And, believe me, you're far too pretty to lock up below decks." She says with a laugh that doesn't make her words less chilling. "Unless, of course, someone's trying to steal you. Then I'll just lock you in with the cargo, I suppose."

That's not much better, although she supposes being kept with the valuables is meant to be a compliment. She wonders if the ship's cargo hold is full of gold coins and gemstones, and briefly considers how she'd look splayed out on them. And then turns a virulent shade of green because oh goodness she shouldn't be thinking things like that.

"And if you think for a single second that I won't take care of you, then you haven't been paying very good attention."

Rosa wants to smile at that buy she can't, she really can't. So she closes her eyes.

"Just take a deep breath, darling and have a rest." Mindfang says, sighing at Rosa's lack of response.

She nods and finally lets herself burrow beneath the blankets. This gets, at the least, a chuckle out of Mindfang. She pats Rosa's shoulder, gently and gets off the bed and Rosa surprises herself in that she lifts her head and says:

"Thank you."

Mindfang, who has crossed the room to her desk once more, stops in the motion of pulling a leather-bound book off one of the shelves. She doesn't turn to face Rosa immediately and she replaces the book on her shelf.

"Why?" She asks, softly, turning her head and giving Rosa a small, sympathetic smile that says more than any words ever could. "You have nothing to thank me for."

Rosa doesn't know if that's a warning or an acknowledgement. It doesn't sound like a threat-- she doesn't look like she's threatening her. She's smiling but she doesn't look affectionate, exactly. She looks more... more along the lines of... heartbroken.

Rosa doesn't know what to make of it. So she pulls the duvet up over her head and lets herself once more fall into the abyss of sleep.

* * *

That night she dreams of her son, her son safe at last, curled up at her side in the sitting room of their little cottage. His head is nestled into her shoulder and she pulls him close. He's warm like he always is, and the solid feel of him cuddled up to her is enough to make her feel happy for the first time in years.

She wakes up at the feel of someone slipping into bed beside her, Without processing things fully, because sleep is gripping the edges of her consciousness like damp sand around her feet, she shifts closer, nuzzling the back that's turned to her.

Safe, is all she thinks as Mindfang responds to her sleepy nudging by snorting and curling an arm around her waist. She's asleep before she can fully process everything. She slips into her dreams with a face pressed to her neck and arms holding her close. Safe. She's safe for the first time she can remember, safe and warm and comfortable at someone else's side.
or, seriously I don't think you know what you're doing. at all.

Chapter Summary

Sometimes crying really does get you everything. And other times it just makes you feel really pathetic.

Chapter Notes

or, Mindfang pulls a Liz Lemon.

Rosa wakes up to the feeling of someone climbing over her. She's first bewildered and then her chest compresses because oh god someone's coming after her-- she doesn't want this oh god--

She tenses and tries her best to pull away. She screws her eyes shut and clenches her fists around the sheets beneath her face in preparation of attack. She hates this, she hates waking up in the middle of the night to someone trying to get the best of her, someone trying to regain a shred of their dignity by completely destroying someone else's. So far, down in the dungeons where the slaves are kept during the day, she's made it clear that she is not someone to be fucked with. Mostly by virtue of spending her scant free time sitting like a well-bred lady in a corner of the room and making it more than clear that if anyone gets within a foot of her she will use her fingernails to remove their eyeballs. You only have to do that a few times before someone gets the picture.

Just as she's preparing to dig her nails into soft flesh, the weight on top of her vanishes. Her heart is pounding ridiculously fast. What the hell is going on? Why would anyone crawl atop her and then just-- quit? She was rather looking forward to asserting herself for once.

With groggy thoughts she remembers where she is and what in fresh hell's going on. Bed. She's in bed. In her Mistress's bed. Silk sheets beneath her face, thick feather mattress beneath her back. She's impossibly warm and cozy, and she can hear the swish of the bed curtains falling back into place as Mindfang-- because who else would be in bed with her?-- gets up.

There's the sound of a pair of bare feet softly thudding to the floor of the cabin and then a muttered: 'oh fuck dammit all' and then the scuffling noise of someone trying to shove their feet into boots as quietly as possible. A door opens with a creak-- another loud curse-- and then closes with a 'slam' and then a muffled curse.

When she's sure that she's alone, she opens her eyes. She stares up at the ceiling for a few moments with increasing trepidation. What in the fresh fuck is going on? All she can smell is jasmine and sandalwood. It's a far cry from her little cabin-- oh lord it's only been a day and she's already thinking it's 'hers'. Nothing is hers, nothing at all. Not even the clothes on her back-- not that she wants to own those, really.

She sighs, heavily, and sits up. The bedroom is warm, almost uncomfortably so, but she's not entirely sure of the last time she felt this comfortable. Oh, to hell with it. She can't remember the last time she slept in a proper bed-- excluding the little cot in the cabin from the night before. Mindfang's bed is
gargantuan and perfect, the mattress so plush she doesn't want to take the time to look at the worn patches in the embroidery on the duvet or the places where the sky silk sheets have been stained; Everything is built for comfort and pleasure, even the heavy blue velvet curtains. Novel concept, that, Rosa thinks with a yawn, shoving them aside. Keep the light out, warmth in— a little quieter too, she imagines. And it's very intimate. Incredibly intimate. No one would know what goes on behind them if someone were to, per say, burst into the room to bring news of an emergency.

If she were more completely awake, the implications of this might upset her. But since she's still caught up in the dreamy haze of a pleasant night's sleep, all she can consider is the fact that by having curtains on your bed you virtually eliminate the awkwardness of having someone walking in on you sleeping naked.

She lets out a sigh and pushes the curtains aside. It would be highly pleasurable to crawl back under the covers and sleep for the next two sweeps, but something tells her that's not very appropriate behavior. Her Mistress hasn't told her anything remotely useful, other than the fact that she will not be going anywhere that isn't by her side for the foreseeable future. With that reminder settling its weight around her shoulders once more, Rosa places her feet onto the floor.

There's a beautiful fire going strong in the hearth, with a pile of carefully stacked logs beside it. There's a pile of clothes draped over the couch and a pile of boots seem to have made an escape from the shoe rack. Dishes from what must have been last night's evening tea are sitting on the desk, a half-full cup of tea and a tea pot sans it's painted china cover.

In short, the space from yesterday has gone from needing a little upkeep to needing a deep cleaning. Rosa wrinkles her nose at it all. Oh god is this what this woman lives like? Honestly? Surrounded by such luxurious settings and the entire place looks like it's been hit by a tornado.

"Oh my." She mutters, rubbing at her temples. "Ohhh my."

What in the world is wrong with this woman? Honestly. Does she not know how to pick up after herself? Is it really that difficult? Or maybe it's a matter of not caring. Either way, Rosa doesn't think it seems like much of a way to live.

She wants to clean. She wants to clean all of it. Her fingers are itching to do something, anything useful. She can't recollect the last time she did something to make herself pertinent. Is she allowed to, though? Will she get in trouble? She does seem like a rather private woman; not many people appreciate their things being rifled through to begin with and, as a pirate, she probably appreciates it even less.

But, she is a slave after all. Not even fully considered to be a sentient being where the law is concerned. Her will isn't her own anymore and she's pretty sure if you're going to buy someone you can hardly be upset if they sweep the floor a little.

Without thinking about it any more than she needs to, because she's starting to go do a dark place mentally, she slips out of bed and over to the pile of shoes. This is something she can do. This is how she can be useful, even if it's just a little thing. A little thing like pairing up boots and lining them toe-first together, in descending height order so that the next morning, perhaps, her mistress won't end up jumbling her boots onto the floor.

It takes twenty minutes to get them paired up and perfectly arranged, mostly because the shoes are all over the room. There's even one underneath the bathtub, concealed behind a screen in a corner of the room. She sits back on her feet and lets out a satisfied hum. There. One thing fixed.

One thing. One thing fixed in a series of millions of broken things piling up on top of the other. One
minuscule, insignificant thing. But you have to start destroying a mountain by getting rid of the gravel, she supposes, and forces all of the screaming in her head to rein itself into a dull roar.

She doesn't feel expressly comfortable messing about in this room. It feels like she's violating something sacred, ignoring the fact that she's on a pirate ship. She's been to truly sacred places, buildings where you can feel spirituality settle around your shoulders like a damp down comforter and underground caverns where the force of nature itself has turned into something magnificent. She knows sacred from, well, from whatever the hell this is.

Sacred is not the correct word for what this place is. But she's exhausted of overthinking things, exhausted of---- having to be alive, having to wake up every morning and remember how hard it is to keep herself going. So, to be precise, she has no energy left for good diction. And upon reflection, she really doesn't feel quite comfortable messing about anyone else's things.

Especially when it's entirely possible she'll be killed for it. Or she, well, supposes she'll be killed for it. That's how things work in situations like this, correct?

So she sits in the center of the room, motionless. Her hands are folded in her lap before her and her feet are uncomfortably trapped beneath her. This is not very pleasant whatsoever, she quickly realizes.

Sitting all alone and waiting. Waiting for what? For Mindfang to come back? That could take hours. It's a rather large ship, after all, and she must be a very busy woman. People to slaughter, villages to plunder and other ships to, erm, sink? Is that what pirates do? She's not actually sure. She has a few ideas about it, of course.

She really would rather not admit to it, but... if anyone were to search beneath her bed down in the caverns of the Mother Grub, there is a locked box of frivolous literature. Extremely frivolous literature. Extremely frivolous literature of an erotic nature. Mostly of a historical nature.

Okay. Mostly about pirates. She, uh, kind of had a thing for nautical adventure in her youth. And right now she's regretting it immensely. Is it karma? She's pretty sure it is. She's pretty sure everything that's happened in her life is some sort of cosmic retribution for the fact that she dared to go against the mandates of the world and leave her duties.

If she'd just remained down there, satisfied with her lot in life, she'd be safe now. Safe-- and-- safe. That's all she'd be. Without meaning to, Rosa's fingers are digging into her thighs once more. This time the worn fabric of her dress finally does give way, blood staining it a sharp jade before she has a chance to gasp and pull it away.

Safe. That's all she would have been. Safe and bored and forever wondering what life would have been like if she'd picked up that little boy lying all alone just outside of the cave. Gone to bed every night remembering him crying as she turned her back on him and walked away. Eaten every meal with his screams in her ears. And sleeping with nightmares of an abandoned child. No.

No, she knows she'll never regret pulling off her shawl and bundling the squalling infant in green merino wool. And she'll never forget how the cool the desert's night air was against her face as she stepped outside for the first time in decades, how her skin prickled and her eyes watered because, well, her little boy fell asleep in her arms for the first time. And...

And...

And she'll never forget it. Not as long as she lives. She won't forget the first time his tiny hand curled around her finger, or the first time he ran over to her and giggled: 'mama, mama!' or the first time
they curled up together in an actual house instead of in a cave in the middle of nowhere and he was sheer delighted by the concept of windows.

There's hundreds upon thousands of little things, smiles and sentences and sighs that she'll never forget. And it hurts. It hurts her in places she can't speak of, her heart clenching around a void that nothing else in the world can ever fill every time she allows her mind to drift towards it.

She lets out a low groan and raises her hands to her face. Oh god she's thinking about it. She's thinking about him now and she's not going to be able to stop but-- oh-- god her face is wet. Is she crying? No. No she can't be crying. If she starts crying she'll never stop and then before she knows it she'll end up god knows where sold into slavery. That's what happened last time. One second you're collapsing under the grief of losing your son and the strain of slaughtering half the imperial guard and the next minute you're stark naked being sold to the highest bidder.

And then after a few months of degrading abuse at the hands of some of the most vile flesh traders to walk the planet, you get bought by a pirate.

She takes a deep breath. In through your nose, Rosa, and out through your mouth. Good. Good. You can do this. Just calm down and sit up straight.

With her arms trembling, Rosa pulls her hands away from her face. She can't sit here. She can't sit here alone any longer or she's going to fall to pieces. Surely there must be something to be done, something that won't get her whipped and thrown into the bowels of the ship. For one thing, that's silly. Mindfang wouldn't hurt her. Or, well. She would hurt her, of course, but not vindictively. Um. Maybe vindictively. But for personal reasons. So long as she doesn't do anything to personally offend Mindfang, she's unlikely to be beaten. That seems reasonable.

While she might protest against her Mistress's apparent lack of respect for master slave etiquette, she's hardly going to go out of her way to provoke a suitably violent reaction. But she can't stay here. She can't. She needs something to take her mind off of all of... this. Although how she thinks she can do that when she's dressed in something that seems to be third cousin to a burlap sack with a collar around her neck and wrists rubbed raw from spending over a year in manacles is beyond her.

She gets to her feet slowly, smoothing the skirt of her ridiculously horrible dress down around her thighs. Rosa takes a deep, deep breath and steps towards the cabin door. Alright, Rosa. Alright. You can do this. It's a door handle. It's a door handle and a bit of wood between you and the entirety of a pirate ship. A pirate shit, Rosa. Don't you know what this means? It's an adventure! Think of it like that.

An adventure that will surely strip your dignity from you within the week. But it's an adventure all the same.

* * *

She pushes the door open without any effort. It's a bit anticlimactic, really, how easy it is. When she steps outside, it's into the confused light of dawn, the witching hour where darkness and light meet and battle for supremacy. Right now the battlefield is still raging strong and the light is filtering through the clouds in a rather depressing shade of gray.

But the sea, oh mother in heaven, the sea. How it glitters! How it shines! She didn't know water could look like that. She feels tears stinging the back of her eyes and her throat begins to swell with emotion. She stands, motionless, before the cabin door, with her eyes open wide. The light that's filtered out by the clouds seems to have made its way beneath the water and as the waves swell and
crash, everything seems to be a brilliant kaleidoscope of blues and grays and greens.

She could stand here for the rest of her life, here in this doorway with her eyes wide and hands shaking. If she's going to die here at sea, she's-- well-- she's satisfied.

There's a few sailors scattered about the deck, each fiddling with something she can't understand and, to be quite rude, doesn't want to.

She steps out onto the deck cautiously, her need to do something to keep herself sane completely at war with her need to do nothing and, therefore, minimize her risk of getting in trouble. She feels strongly that her wisest course of action would to be crawl back in bed-- crawl back in her Mistress's bed-- and sleep until she's woken up. It is, of course, rather obvious that Mindfang had not intended to wake her so she doubts she'll get punished for lying in a bit. But on the other hand, she abhors laziness. And if she's awake, she's awake. She'll never get comfortable lying there thinking about how she's curled up between someone else's sheets, let alone the fact that god knows the last time they've been washed.

As she takes a few steps forward, she's immediately buffered by a blast of icy sea air. It's cold, colder than she'd expected it would be. Or perhaps yesterday she'd been far too caught up in the panic of it all to notice anything. She does recollect now, that she had been wrapped up in a blanket while out on the balcony of her Mistress's quarters. She wants to duck back into the cabin almost immediately, but she'll be damned if she surrenders this view so easily.

So she steps farther into the abyss. The wood is smooth beneath her feet and she wraps her arms around herself in an attempt to preserve some of her body heat. Mindfang is nowhere to be seen, not even when she cranes her neck up to the bridge above. There's a familiar figure standing at the wheel, however, the man who had looked at her kneeling half-conscious in a slave market and said, quietly:

'Well. That's unexpected.'

She finds the stairs to the bridge with a little more difficulty than she'd like to admit to, but the polished mahogany of the banister is slick like oil beneath her hands as she takes the steps deliberately. When she breaks onto the bridge proper, her breath flies from her lungs once more. The view from here is even better and-- well-- she begins to wonder if she'll be allowed to sleep up here, on a hammock perhaps.

"Madame." Her sailor friend says softly, raising his eyebrows. She doesn't know what to do because no one's spoken to her like that in eons. So she does what the sisters always told her, bows her head low in acknowledgement and says, softly:

"You honor me, Sir."

"Learned my good manners from the Captain, Miss." He says, quietly, his gaze never leaving the dusty horizon. Rosa can see him smirking, not unkindly. "She's a bit of a stickler for proper etiquette."

"Mmm." Rosa says, softly, following his gaze to where the bow of the ship is splitting the sea, also smirking, trying not to laugh. She can see herself getting along with him quite nicely. "I can see that."

"On the subject, Miss, I don't mean to be rude, but--" He breaks off, glances over his shoulder to the cabin behind him. There's a notice posted on the door with spiky handwriting that simply says: 'Map Room. Go Away.'
He gestures towards the door with one of his horns and says, quietly: "Speaking of the Captain, I might advise you to make yourself scarce."

"...Have I--?"

"Oh, no. Don't look so scared. She's just-- you know. In a bit of a state." He shrugs, softly.
"Someone messed with her maps and... well... she doesn't like that."

Rosa nods, as if she understands what in the world could be so wrong with looking at a map or two, and lets out a soft sigh. "I don't suppose you know what she'd like for me to be doing?"

"To be quite frank, I don't think she even knows yet. Just don't make any trouble. If the men give you a hard time, send 'em to me and I'll see to it that they're sorted out."

"And you are?" She asks, raising an eyebrow. He does look rather important, she supposes. High necked purples admiral's coat with the sleeves rolled to his elbows showing off some absolutely intricate tattoo work. Bright, keen green eyes and hair that has more than obviously been bleached white. Skin weathered a dark gray by the sunshine, with patches of a rich green on his cheeks and nose where he's been burned. He looks like a rather capable sailor, not old or young, a suitable amount of scars and pretty damn competent, if that's something that can be judged from looks alone

"Marcus." He says, with a salute. "First mate. If you can't find the Captain, track me down and I'll act in her place."

"Oh?"

"Well. Perhaps not in your case, as it were. Don't think she'd appreciate that. She'll be a bit particular about you, I'd imagine."

"Quite." Rosa says with a small, tight smile. "Thank you."

She wants to slip into the map room and see her Mistress. It seems far more appropriate to be sent away by the woman who owns her instead of her second in command, but, well, there's something to be said for avoiding potential danger.

Things are going considerably well between them, for the moment. And while the sensible portion of her brain knows perfectly well that encouraging an illusion will simply break her heart and she should, well, get the bad part over with-- the rest of her wants to be cosseted as long as possible.

"Feel free to have a look around." The first mate says with a sweeping gesture at the ship below. "Don't get hurt, she will have my neck." Seeing her horrified face, he laughs. "By which I mean yell and throw things. We go back a long ways, she won't kill me."

She nods and gives him a tight smile. With a lingering glance at the map room's closed door, she slips down the stairs to the main deck once more. She doesn't know anything about ships, so she had no idea what to refer to anything as-- first floor isn't the correct phrase, surely. Main deck sounds acceptable, however, so for the moment she'll go with that. Perhaps if she manages to remain in her Mistress's good graces she can get herself a lesson in nautical geography. She'd hate to sound ignorant, even if she is.

The ship still seems rather quiet for what must be a very well-staffed vessel. There's more sailors scattered about, all of whom give her curt nods but say nothing. No one seems to want to pay that much attention to her, which is just alright by her standards. She's nervous around strangers and always has been. Perhaps once she gets a little more familiar she'll be able to smile at them and introduce herself but-- well-- looking at them, she can't help but remember that she's beneath all of
them, her worth far less than that of the average drunken sailor.

She doesn't want to look at them because she's not sure how in the world she'll be able to tolerate the blow to her ego. What little ego she has left, that is.

There's a hatch open to the deck below and, with a nervous glance at the man clambering out of it, she shuffles over to investigate. There's a set of rough stairs leading down to what looks like a storage space, full of bags and ropes and other ship-related detritus. There's a small cat curled up on one of the bags and her heart skips a beat. It's a small animal, sweet faced with a striped tabby face and an orange tipped tail. It reminds her of a kitten that her son carried home in the middle of the night and, suddenly, she wants nothing more than to have the animal in her arms.

She slips down the stairs as quietly as she can manage, unwilling to draw attention to herself or spook the animal. When she crouches down before it the cat cracks its beautiful green eyes open and lets out a delicate mewl. Rosa reaches out a tremulous hand and traces one of its ears. The feline appears to be more than happy to receive affection and jumps into her arms without prompting.

Rosa stands with the cat in her arms, absently running her hands over its fur. The space she's in is absolutely cavernous, stretching out as far as she can see. It's lit by a combination of lanterns and small portholes, but it's nothing like Mindfang's cabin up above. She can faintly make out a series of hammocks further down, some of which are occupied by slumbering sailors. Ahhh, so this is where everyone sleeps. It looks rather more pleasant than she expected, the floor clean and the hammocks draped in pillows and blankets to ward off the chill.

She makes a slow revolution, scrutinizing the entirety of the space. There's a ladder leading down to another floor beneath and she peers at it for a few seconds before deciding against descending any further. It seems darker down there, and a sneaking suspicion in the back of her skull says that in any other ship that's exactly where she'd be locked up. Going down there is just tempting fate to give her nightmares.

Behind her is a door that's standing half open and she can hear noises echoing out, the clanging of cutlery and the low rumble of voices. The dining room, then? She half wants to go in and see, perhaps, if there's any work to be done there, but braving the crew is enough to make her shiver. There's another door beside the dining room and she steps towards it cautiously. The door opens when she tugs at the handle. The room beyond is small and mostly empty. It looks like a sparsely furnished cabin, much like the room she was placed in yesterday, but without much light at all. There's a bed, there's a chair and there's a table but not much else. It's a good enough place to 'make herself scarce' and she slips inside.

Rosa settles onto the bunk with her feet tucked up beside her. Her little furry companion has begun to purr and she smiles. She couldn't say how long she's down there for before she falls asleep. It's cold down here, probably because there's no sunlight, and with a warm creature cuddled up to her chest she can't particularly move. It's a fitful slumber and she wakes up several times. She knows it can't have been more than an hour because when she wakes up to the sound of someone pounding down the stairs the sun still hasn't completely risen.

She feels disgusted at herself for falling asleep-- goodness she must have slept a good fourteen hours last night. She can't get in the habit of constantly sleeping because she really can't afford that sort of luxury. The cat is still asleep in her lap and with a sigh she shoo's it away. There's a plethora of hairs left behind on her ragged gray dress and that's enough to set her teeth on edge even more. This day hasn't gotten off to a good start whatsoever and it would appear that things are just going to get worse.

The space before her has been completely evacuated-- aside from some sailors still asleep, she's all
alone. The night watch taking their rest, she supposes, recollecting the men who had populated the deck as she’d made her way to Mindfang's cabin.

She wants to climb the stairs back up into the sunlight and take her place at Mindfang’s side because she's lonely and-- horrifically enough-- bored. She doesn't have anything to do without Mindfang before her to boss her around.

But it's only been a little while and she doesn't want to risk being a bother. So instead of doing what she wants and tripping up the stairs to the map room, she takes a deep breath and descends the ladder to the next floor. There's no light down here save for a pair of lanterns to either side of the stairs. It's dark and dank and smells like mold. She doesn't like it. She doesn’t like it at all.

It reminds her of the jail she'd been kept in for weeks, listening to her children screaming where she couldn't reach them, and the slave holds that she'd been locked in for weeks at a time, dark and windowless with scores of others screaming for their freedom. Her breath is seizing up in her throat but she can't help it-- she can't help her curiosity to know what in the world is down here. Surely not other slaves because, well, why should she be singled out? And she can't hear anyone screaming, which is the usual sort of dead giveaway.

So, with her breath congealing in her lungs, she pulls one of the lanterns off the hook and steps forward. It really is unpleasant down here. Incredibly unpleasant. There aren't any signs of maintenance, aside from a thick layer of tar coating the spaces between the wood that makes up the ship's walls. In her bare feet she can feel dampness in the floorboards, dampness and a little bit of mold that makes her path slick.

She's afraid that the darkness will go on for a mile, but it doesn't. There's a wall built just a few yards into the room that spans the entirety of the ship's width and the only door she finds refuses to open. All that she can think of is 'slave hold' and it's enough to make her close her eyes in an attempt to quell anxiety. But when she presses her ear to the door, she hears nothing at all.

What am I doing? She thinks, curling her fingers tightly around the ring of the lantern and letting out an exhausted sigh. What the hell am I doing? Trying to find a deep, dark secret? Why not just accept your fate. You don't have a say in what happens to you, no matter how nice Miss Mindfang is or how well-behaved you are. If she wants to lock you down here, you'll be locked down here. And if she wants to keep you curled up in her bed all day long you don't have a choice about that either.

Although that is the preferable option, however. She takes a moment to consider whether she'd prefer to be chained to the foot of her bed and kept like a woman in a harem, or to be trapped down here for the extent of her stay.

The answer, to her surprise, is the harem one. She's not the type to compromise her morals for anything and she'd always sworn to herself that she wouldn't do anything ethically questionable, but...

Mindfang is a very attractive woman. And more to the point, she's got a comfortable bed. Rosa lets out a groan and slumps against the wall, falling to the floor. Oh god is this how degraded she's been? So broken to the point that she'll sacrifice honor for a comfortable night's sleep? But is that so terrible, really?

Lovely. She closes her eyes and drops her chin to her knecaps. One day at sea and you're giving way to swashbuckling ethics. Rosa wraps her arms around her legs, pulling them close to her chest to keep some of her warmth into herself. The lantern flickers beside her, casting heavy shadows up the walls.
What's to become of me? She asks herself with a heady sigh. What in the world am I supposed to do?

There isn't anyone to ask, there's no advice to be had. There aren't any shoulders to cry on or facades to preserve to keep up morale. No one is relying on her to be strong and without a constant reminder of why she should stand tall it's getting harder by the hour not to collapse.

She swallows, thickly, and tears start to sting the backs of her eyes. Alone. That's what she is, now. All alone. Even on a ship that must be populated by at least twenty others, she's alone. Anyone who would be looking out for her is long gone, lost to the Handmaid or to the darkness of the Empire.

Oh god she shouldn't be thinking about this. It's going to break her faster than being beaten, starved and left to die in a pitch black room.

Rosa covers her face with her hands, pressing at her eyes with her fingertips. No Rosa. No crying. Please. Please, Sweetheart, no crying. She snuffles loudly and then drops her head back. Okay. Okay she can do this. She can keep it together-- if only until the end of the week.

She gets to her feet slowly, feeling as if her bones belong to that of an 70 year old guardian of the Matriorb instead of the vastly younger excommunicated Apostate she actually is. The rocking of the ship is stronger down here and keeping her balance is beginning to become quite the feat.

It's time to get out of here. Darkness doesn't become her. It reminds her of home but it reminds her of hell. It's not a good duality to process.

She pads slowly towards the stairs, taking small steps to minimize the risk of falling over and accidentally setting the ship ablaze. Things that get you whipped half to death? Burning down your Mistress's ship. That has to be a commandment written down somewhere.

As she's about to ascend the ladder back up to the mid-deck, her lantern suddenly burns out. Well. Oh dear. That's hardly beneficial.

(Things can always get worse than cat hair on your clothes, she thinks with a grumble).

The other lantern is still burning brightly at the foot of the stairs and she heads for it with an added urgency in her steps. She hangs the burned out lantern back on its hook and starts up the stairs. She stumbles halfway up and pauses to regain her footing because she'll be damned if she falls backwards into a hole at the bottom of a pirate ship and breaks a leg. What do they do with slaves who break legs, anyways? She's relatively sure that the answer is 'kill them and throw them overboard' and she'd really prefer to avoid that.

When she looks up, however, all semblance of coordination is slaughtered. Mindfang is standing on the stairs in front of her, arms crossed before her with a pair of bared fangs.

Rosa gasps and takes a quick step back. Mindfang parries by stepping forward and they repeat the performance until both of them are on terra firma. Rosa's not entirely sure what to say because-- oh god she looks furious-- because she has yet to do anything but snarl. She stares back at her Mistress with words of apology rising in her throat, but nothing's agreeing to come out. Panic has seized her like a cobra and she can't seem to find the words to explain herself.

What she's done wrong, exactly, is unknown. But the fact that she HAS done something wrong is quite obvious because-- well-- that's an impressive glare. A very impressive glare.

And then she strikes. Strikes impressively quickly, moving like a snake through grass, movements assured and fluid.
She feels the hands snaking around her neck before she can react. Fingers, digging into her collar and a bony wrist digging into her throat. Mindfang shoves her back quickly, repeatedly, hard enough to make her trip over her own feet. She's slammed into the wall of the ship, her head knocking painfully against the paneling, vision going electrically white before fuzzing back into focus.

"Now darling," A voice breathes into her ear, a body suddenly pressed against her own. "I don't mean to be... well, mean, but who in the world gave you permission to wander off like this?"

Her voice is artificially sweet, the words curdling in Rosa's ears like tea that's been left to steep too long and goes bitter in your mouth before you can swallow. It's a terrifying controlled fury that she's displaying, anger tinged by a shaky display of self-control. Her seven pupils seem to be shaking a little as she snarls down at Rosa and it's breathtakingly paranormal. Rosa would appreciate it if she wasn't dizzy with fear.

She can't exactly breathe with the way she's being forced against the wall, so she assumes that the question she's been asked is rhetorical. Either way, it's she couldn't answer. She lets out the best whine she can muster up and reaches up to tug fruitlessly at the hand that's tugging at her collar.

"I'm a reasonable woman," The hand around her neck tightens. A pair of lips press at her temple just beneath her ear. "I don't like to be nasty. I don't like to cause problems. I just want a few simple things: to be kept happy and to be obeyed without question."

There's nails digging into her throat, now, insulated by the leather of Mindfang's gloves. Another black-leather clad hand curls around her chin and shoves her head back, sending her horns digging into the wood of the ship's wall. It hurts, sending twin stabs of pain down behind her eyes.

She's staring Mindfang dead in the eyes now. She's gripping her face hard enough that it must bruise by the end of the hour. Her heart is pounding so hard she knows there's no way she can live, no way her heart can keep this up without giving way from the stress. For a fraction of a second Rosa considers begging for her life. She knows that's what she's expected to do, what she should do-- but--

She doesn't want to. She's had enough of begging. So instead she stares. Mindfang glowers back and then, with a huff, releases her. Rosa crumples to the floor gasping frantically. Mindfang crouches down before her and curls her fingers through the brass ring attached to her collar and tugs, hard. Rosa falls forward and-- thank God-- Mindfang catches her.

"I don't wish to be unreasonable. But in the future I would prefer for you to never go beneath decks." She murmurs, her voice low and rumbling in the darkness. "And if you're going to see fit to wander off, inform me."

"I didn't mean to upset you, Mistress." She says, a little hoarsely and a little horrified at the fact that she sounds like she's apologizing.

"I know you didn't, Pet." Mindfang hisses, softly, wrapping her arms around her in a gesture of affection that's oddly out of place with the fact that she was being strangled just a few seconds ago. "But I must make it clear, while I am far more inclined to spoil you... I will not hesitate to assert my authority."

Her voice has gone deathly cold and serious, remaining at a monotone. She's completely serious, without a trace of humor in her words. Rosa wants to twitch. She wants to twitch and slap her away and snarl but-- well--

"Yes, Mistress." She says, softly, her voice refusing to crack above a whisper.
"Good girl." Mindfang says without a smile, running her hands through Rosa's hair. She gets to her feet, glowering all the while. For first time Rosa is forced to consciously realize that yes, while she's beautiful and well-dressed woman... she's terrifying. In the darkness of the hold her eyes lack the warmth and shine they have up in the sun and her skin is as pale and cold as silver snow. She's still gorgeous when angry, of course. And that in and of itself is impressively dangerous. She wonders for the space of a second if this is how moths feel as they fly into the light of an open lantern, knowing they'll be burned alive but unable to resist the siren's call.

That is, of course, until Mindfang raises an arm. Raises it quickly, drawing her shoulder back and---- it's a quick motion, but to Rosa it seems slow and deliberate. She flinches back before she can stop herself, covering her face with her hands and letting out a pained whine. If she was a little more aware she'd beg for mercy but, at the moment, she's too afraid to form words.

But instead of the anticipated blow to the head, Mindfang’s staring down at her, the burnt out lantern safely returned to its hook beside Rosa's head.

"Oh come now. I'm not that bad." She mutters, huffing loudly. "Stop being ridiculous and get up. I'm not having you stay down here."

Rosa opens her eyes, slowly. Mindfang's still frowning but she looks more annoyed than angry now.

"Get up and stop being stupid before I lost my temper."

Rosa wants to say 'you're not being particularly reassuring, you know' but she's still shaking, still doing her best to calm her heart to reasonable levels. She gets up slowly, using the wall behind her as a stabilizer. Her head is pounding and she wants nothing more than to go back to bed because when she's asleep she stops worrying about all of this.

When she's standing once more, Mindfang curls a controlling hand around her upper arm and yanks her towards the stairs. The sharp tug is enough to send her tripping into Mindfang. Rosa grabs onto the back of her coat in a frantic attempt not to fall face-first onto the ship's floor. Her Mistress lets out an irritated growl and stops mid stride.

Rosa flinches, pulling her chin to her collarbone and closing her eyes once more. Mindfang groans, exhausted, and rubs at her temples.

"Pet, I don't recollect you being this anxious yesterday-- for the love of--" Mindfang frowns as Rosa loses her balance once more, caught up in the rocking of the ship. She places a hand at each shoulder, holding her gently in place. Rosa's still tense, looking anywhere but up at her face.

"Oh hell-- would you-- I've spooked you, haven't I?" She says with a low groan. She drops her head back and snarls at the ceiling. Her hair drops behind her like a curtain across the stage. "Pet. Darling dear. I have a short temper. I won't insult your intelligence by pretending I'm a good person, either. I'm going to get pissed at you. I'm going to get angry-- I'm going to yell and possibly throw things. You do understand that, I hope?"

"Yes, Mistress." She says, softly, staring at the floor.

"Oi." She snaps twice. "Up here. Look at me."

That's about the last thing she wants to do but-- well-- Mistress's orders. So she raises her head and makes eye contact. Her hands are shaking profusely and if it weren't for the fact that she thinks fainting might get her beaten she'd be unconscious.

"Pet. I have a temper. But I'm not stupid, okay? Not going to lie, I'm grumpy. If you're going to listen
to me, though, we won't have problems. Be good and I won't hurt you, hmm?"
She doesn't respond. The point she'd prefer to raise is that she doesn't know what's wanted of her, so
how can she behave but--

"Are you listening?"

"Yes, Mistress."

"Good. Now stop acting like I beat you over the head with a crowbar and be sensible." Mindfang
sighs, heavily. "I'm not having a particularly good morning, and to be quite frank you sulking is the
last thing I have the patience to deal with. Now, can we go back upstairs?"

"If you wish, Mistress."

"Thank you." Mindfang gives her a tight smile and pats her cheek. "You're freezing-- you shouldn't
be down here wearing next to nothing like this."

"Sorry, Mistress." She says, softly, dropping her head once more.

"Ugh, no, no stop that. Stop looking like I kicked you, I didn't kick you. I don't want a kicked
puppy, okay? So just don't even start with me. I just want you to listen to me. You're making me feel
like a total bitch right now, Pet, and I don't like it."

"I don't mean to do so, Mistress. I am sincerely sorry--" She says, her voice cracking. Suddenly, this
is all far too much for her to bear. Her brain is short circuiting and if it was acceptable behavior, she'd
climb into her Mistress's arms and cry.

"No-- ugh-- no, please, stop-- no don't make that face please-- I mean-- no, please-- I mean--
Damnitall DON'T CRY." Mindfang goes from flustered to desperate in a flurry of anxious hand
gestures.

She looks a lot younger when she's upset, Rosa notices through a shaking breath. Mindfang looks
torn between pulling Rosa into her arms and making a run for the stairs. A lot younger. Perhaps it's
the sudden dissolution of her confidence, or maybe it's the fact that when her eyes go wide she looks
almost innocent. The keyword being 'almost', because any woman who has that many scars can't be
at all harmless.

Unless, of course, you're a slave. But then you've usually got a scarred back, not sword wounds
going across your face.

"Just-- Stop! Stop! It's okay! I'm not angry! I'm not angry! Okay I'm really angry, but-- you don't
need to cry about it! Sheeeeeeeesh. You'd think I killed your cat or something."

She holds her hands before her face and wrinkles her nose. "Just. C'mon. Give me a break here."

Rosa nods, nervously, and wrings her hands. She wants to cover her face and crawl back into a
corner but Mindfang already got testy about that so she's unwilling to try and--

"Just don't go anywhere without my permission and I'll consider the issue moot." She says, finally,
slumping over a little. "Fuck. Just don't-- do that thing with your face. I'm allowed to be mean. I'm in
charge."

"Yes, Mistress." She says, again, bowing her head. "You are."
"...You know that doesn't actually make me feel any better. Fuck."

"Sorry, Mistress." Rosa says again, feeling like she's been demoted to parrot status. It's the correct thing to say, of course, but she's not exactly enjoying it. Terrified, yes. Degraded? Yes. Which is better in the long run-- safe, but demoted to nothing more than syllabic noises, or in perpetual danger but having a bit of fun? Right now the former option seems incredibly preferable.

"Yeah, I bet you are." She grumbles, but slings an arm around her waist and tugs her close. Mindfang huffs and starts up the stairs, one arm around her and the other gripping at her shoulder. "Fuck, you are freezing, poor thing. Why the hell did you even come down here? Huh? Scaring me half to death." Her tone is cajoling now, falsely chipper and pathetically desperate to calm and subdue.

"Sorry, Mistress." She says again, but considering how close Mindfang's holding her now things don't seem as bad. Perhaps it's being touched by another living being, but the choice between abject desolation and violence prone company, she'll have to sacrifice her physical well-being in order to preserve her sanity.

"I mean. God. Don't you know anything? This is a fucking pirate ship! Do you know who works on pirate ships? Pirates! Not to say that I don't trust my men, it's just-- I don't trust my men." The arm around her waist pulls her closer with each rambling sentence, until they're so close Rosa's face is pressed to her shoulder. "They could make mincemeat of you! And you figure you'll just wake up and wander off to the most secluded location below decks because fuck knows nothing bad is going to happen down there, huh?"

They make it onto the top deck without further incident, Mindfang still holding her close and keeping up a mild lecture that becomes less coherent and more rapid as Rosa doesn't respond. It's almost as if she thinks that the sea breeze is going to blow her off deck.

"Seriously. I left the door unlocked because I thought to myself: 'she seems smart, she'll just wake up and come find me."

"He said not to." She says, softly, as Mindfang begins ushering her towards her cabin.

"Who? Who said what?"

"The man at the wheel. He said not to bother you."

"...DAMNIT MARCUS."

"He said you weren't in a good mood and I should make myself scarce." She repeats, folding her hands in front of her as calmly as she can muster. Mindfang, still holding her close, is giving her a narrow-eyed glower in the sunlight. Silhouetted by the sun with a backdrop of flapping white sails, she looks every inch the pirate queen once more. It's hard to look her in the face, actually, because-- well-- she's frightening again.

"I'm sorry!" She says, quickly, nearly tripping over her words. "I shouldn't have--"

"Hmph. Damn right you shouldn't have." Mindfang mutters, absentmindedly rolling her eyes out across the deck to the bridge. She makes eye contact with her first mate and snarls. Rosa doesn't see what he does in response because-- well-- she's too busy cowering to take notice.

"Come on." Mindfang says with a heavy sigh. "I don't have time to argue this out with you right now."
She guides Rosa over to the cabin she spent the previous day and opens the door. Rosa follows her inside.

"Just. Stay here and don't... don't make any more trouble." Mindfang points to the bed, which someone has apparently taken the time to make up. "I'll have someone bring you breakfast, okay? And-- um-- just-- ignore me, okay? I'm more bark than bite."

Rosa nods, and stares at the floor once more. "Yes, Mistress."

"Get warm, okay?" She brushes Rosa's hair off of her face with an absent gesture, looking her over with an appraising stare. "Like I said yesterday-- I can't have you getting sick on me."

* * *

Mindfang locks the door this time when she leaves. Rosa's glad-- she needs a chance to regain her composure, and the knowledge that she's going to be on her own indefinitely gives her the chance to recompose herself. While being alone still isn't ideal, alone in a comfortable room is better than alone at the bottom of a ship.

An hour passes before one of the sailors knocks at the door to bring her breakfast and when Mindfang reappears most of the day has gone by. The sun is starting to fall low on the horizon-- Rosa watches the sunset with her knees pulls to her chest, a cup of coffee wrapped between her hands. Her head has finally stopped aching from its abrupt encounter with the wall, but she's rather assured her neck is starting to bruise beneath her collar.

She's finishing off the last of the coffee in her mug when the door opens without preamble. Rosa sits up, sleepily forcing herself to pay attention.

"Hey." Mindfang says, raising an eyebrow. She doesn't step into the room but remains in the door, leaning against the frame. "You okay?"

Rosa nods slightly and runs her fingers through her hair in an effort to disguise how nervous she is. Mindfang doesn't seem at all upset now. Her eyes are half closed and her posture screams 'exhaustion'. Rosa wants to get off the bed, wrap a blanket around her shoulders and usher her off to sleep. What is it that she does, even? It seems stressful.

"Yes, Mistress. Thank you."

"Good. Warm enough?"

"Yes."

"Still doing that meek monosyllabic thing instead of warming up to me?" She says with a bit of a pout and a flamboyant hand gesture. With her hair tangled around her neck and her coat wrinkled, she looks like she's purposefully trying to raise a reaction instead of making a polite inquiry.

"A little bit, perhaps. You can make quite the impression." Rosa sets her coffee cup onto the table beside the bed as Mindfang steps into the room, glancing about her anxiously. "I-- don't mean to displease, Mistress."

"Well. Yeah. I'm going to-- I'm going to go to bed, okay? So. You'll be alright?" She sashays over to the bed and leans in close, carefully examining her face. Rosa wants to hug her. And run away screaming. Get yourself together, Rosa, she scolds herself. Stop this silliness. You're either attracted to the woman or you're afraid of her. You can't have it both ways.
"Of course, Mistress. Sleep tight." She smiles as best as she can, and Mindfang grins tiredly in response.

"So thoughtful." Mindfang says with a snort, tilting her head back with the aid of a few fingers to her chin. She stares at Rosa's neck for the better part of a minute and finally says, with a sigh: "I'm sorry I hurt you. It wasn't warranted given the situation."

"...Thank you, Mistress."

Mindfang grimaces and then, before Rosa can react, leans in and kisses her softly. What is it with this woman and lightning strikes? Can't she do anything at normal speed? And whatever happened to romance, a little bit of finesse in your lovemaking? Perhaps it doesn't matter much when you own the woman you're trying to seduce, but she'd appreciate it all the same.

"Mmmm. Whatever. I'm still locking the door." She whispers, smirking. "You know, I'm starting to suspect you're cleverer than you let on, Pet."

"I can't say I know what you mean, Mistress." Rosa says with a blush tingeing her cheeks. "I'm hardly duplicitous."

"Yeah, see, you go and use words like that and-- well-- I'm tired. Stop intriguing me and let me sleep, you seductive creature of the night." She turns toward the door with a little more spring in her step, eyes a little brighter and her smile a little more genuine.

"Good night, Mistress." Rosa calls as Mindfang pulls the door shut. Mindfang peers through the space between door and frame and wrinkles her nose. Her glare this time is completely without venom and that, at the least, is a blessing.

"Night, Rosa." She says, with a salute. "Oh, and if you wander off on me again I will most definitely beat your gorgeous ass from here to next week. Just. You know. To clarify."

And with that parting blow, she slams the door shut and locks it. Rosa stares for a few minutes before slumping once more against the wall.

Well. That was. Interesting.
during which the merits of teasing a sexually frustrated pirate are debated.

Chapter Summary

Mindfang pokes around a little too much and feels bad about it. And Rosa takes it upon herself to finally do something about her hair.

Chapter Notes

If they have intergalactic spaceships and a green moon, they can have pirate ships with indoor plumbing. End of discussion. (For those curious, this is meant to be set in a steampunk Alternia because how can you have pirate ships and intergalactic space ships? I have no idea and blame it on my subject matter).

She's left to her own devices for the better part of her first week aboard. Rosa does her best not to take it personally, but, after six days of sitting uninterrupted and alone in a little room with nothing but a beautiful view of the ocean, she's ready to scream from frustration. She may now have enjoyed the frenzied pace of living as a fugitive revolutionary-- vacation time would have been nice-- but she'd adapted to it over the course of 33 years. The years before that were spent murdering homicidal grubs intent on eating her, and the years before that killing zombies in a desert. These six days are, perhaps, the longest time she's had to herself in the whole course of her life. And while part of her likes it, the rest of her is hoping that something will happen soon. Something, perhaps, involving swashbuckling piracy? Or even flirtatious piracy.

The highlight of every day has, in fact, become the sight of Mindfang looming in her doorway. It's horrible. She knows that. It's horrible how attached she's getting, how the sound of her footsteps outside of the door is enough to make her sit up straight and smile, like a dog left alone in a hive for hours on end, patiently keeping watch at the door for it's master. Unlike a faithful hound, Rosa has some sense of self-decorum and manages to school her face into an expression of complacent benevolence (or intends to do so; how successful she is remains to be seen).

But, she reasons to herself, Mindfang's visits are nice. Nice and a little, um.... ridiculous. One day she comes with tea, an entire pot of black tea, and drinks the whole thing without a word. One day she comes with alcohol and convinces Rosa to drink far too much. Another day she just walks in, collapses on Rosa's bed and says: 'kill me now, please.' The only thing that's consistent about the pirate's visits are how tired she is, and how utterly disheveled she looks. Rosa wonders if there's anyone on the ship making sure she eats and sleeps like a normal troll, but she supposes no one's willing to censure their Captain. Despite slovenly she looks, she's always devastatingly attractive-- perhaps it's something to do with her lipstick? It's a possibility. Rosa isn't willing to explore the subject further, out of a sense of pride.

So far, since her rather disastrous morning of exploration, she hasn't left her cabin. Food is brought to her on a regular basis by the same friendly, white haired troll who always stops to make conversation for a minute, the dishes are cleared out and someone seems to have discovered her appreciation for good tea because someone consistently stops in with a kettle full before she falls asleep. It's not a
situation she should complain about, really. She's got a warm bed, good food and more than adequate time to sleep. It's the first time in almost two decades she's felt well-rested and the first time in three that she's gone to bed with a full stomach more than once a week. She rather feels like a spoiled house cat, doing nothing but lounging in the sun and basking in the little attention that's showered on her. Someone might as well hand her a bowl full of catnip and tell her to light up.

Mindfang is clearly... fond of her. It's hard to put her finger on why, but she always seems to leave the cabin a little happier than when she enters. Rosa's not sure what her Mistress' intentions are, but to this point she's done nothing but pounce on her and kiss her. Kiss her a lot, actually. It's really quite pleasant. Rosa hates herself for admitting it, but she's beginning to feel rather charmed by her Mistress. It's bad. Bad in the nastiest sense of the word, because every slave worth their weight in salt is aware of the fact that the kindness of their owner is simply a weapon in a battle of wills. She's torn between savoring the soft, yielding feel of Mindfang's lips on her neck and remaining staunchly unmoved by all attempts to garner her favor. She's seen how angry Mindfang can get, and her muffled shouting has become the soundtrack to Rosa's lonely days.

What is clear either way is that Mindfang is doing her best to win her over. Whether it's because she feels guilty for scaring her, or because she's genuinely striving to earn Rosa's affection, she's successful. Mindfang isn't strict. She doesn't appear to have any concrete rules, she doesn't appear to have any firm expectations and she most certainly doesn't seem to appreciate strict adherence to behavioral standards. She sits on the end of the bed and flirts, paces the room and bitches about her crew-- to be quite honest, it seems like she needs a friend more than a slave.

It's bizarre. And trusting her is a terrible idea-- the halcyon aura of their hours together is only going to last until the next time Mindfang loses her temper and then who knows what might happen. Waiting for this eventuality, however, is incredibly dull. She's bored. Bored and frustrated. She's willing to do anything-- cook, clean, keep watch, whatever is needed on the ship. But as of yet nothing's been assigned to her. All she knows is that Mindfang is her Mistress and she's to do as her Mistress tells her. Oh, and not to cry because Mindfang gets anxious about that. Really awkwardly anxious. Sitting there making distressed noises and begging her to stop kind of anxious.

The sum of all of this is that, halfway through her seventh day aboard the ship, she resolves to petition for freedom. Freedom being a relative term for what she wants-- asking for liberty while at sea could result in her being thrown overboard and, while she's not sure she would die necessarily, she is sure it would be unpleasant. Perhaps a better way to phrase it is that she decides that it's about time she proved useful to her Mistress.

So when Mindfang slips through the door close to nine that night, Rosa's already sitting up with eyes wide and shoulders tense. Mindfang takes one look at her and says, gruffly:

"Please don't tell me you've done something wrong. Because you haven't, okay? We went over this. You're not doing anything wrong." Her eyes contort into a wide-eyed stare that seems to beg a higher power for mercy. "You're locked in a four by five room. Alone. You can't do anything. Anything at all. Except, like, I don't know, rearrange the furniture? But that's nailed down so NO you can't do anything wrong!"

Rosa gives her a wan smile and shakes her head. Mindfang lets out a relieved sigh and closes the door. She slumps against it and folds her arms across her chest, looking irascibly tired and notably annoyed. Her curls are hanging around her shoulders in tangled heap, almost like a snarl of yarn instead of hair, and her eyes are perilously close to dull and listless, sclera shot through with blue.

"Good. Because the last fucking thing I want to do is listen to you apologize to me for the rest of the night."
"My apologies, Mistress." The words rise, unbidden, coyly shaping themselves around her teeth. She can't help it, really. It's so easy to do.

Luckily, Mindfang seems too tired to fight back. She yawns, and makes her a rude hand gesture. "Fuck you. You did that on purpose."

"Hmm? Oh. Yes, I suppose I did." Rosa crosses her legs and soothes her dress over her knees. Mindfang watches her movements with the suddenly keen eyes of an imperiled prey animal, tracking the appearance and reappearance of her skin like it's a dangerous predator. Rosa finds the attention more than a little flustering, but knows temptation is the best way to earn Mindfang's undivided attention. Within moments she's turned the lock and prowled across the room.

Rosa supposes she's guilty of the same indulgence because, quite frankly, she can't keep her eyes off of the soft swing of her hips. Or the movement of her tongue across her lips as she smiles, red lipstick cutting beautiful contours across her face. Nor can she stop herself from nuzzling into Mindfang's touch as she takes her face in both her hands and tilts her head back. Rosa stares up at her, innocently, idly wondering if Mindfang kisses her while standing because it makes her feel powerful or because it makes her feel less inadequate about their height differences.

When Mindfang kisses her, she's not surprised. Well, she is, but not shocked surprise. More of 'her heart skips two steps ahead and then doubles back on itself' surprised. She doesn't know why Mindfang's so keen on her-- it's not as if Rosa is particularly attractive even at her best (and she's not at her best by any means). But every time she kisses her it's like a quick shot of electricity straight to her knees, making her feel flutty and a little weak in the chest. Her hands want to curl into something, soft flesh, snarled hair, soft sheets-- but as of yet they refuse to move from their place on her thighs. She's afraid to ask permission and she's certainly afraid to make any sort of bold move that could be... misconstrued.

Rosa likes it when she kisses her. She really does. She never thought she'd be this sort of woman, easily won over by the feel of a beautiful woman's lips against her own. Rosa always assumed she would be a terrible kisser but apparently Mindfang begs to differ; there's been an awful lot of osculation going on lately and she's not entirely sure how she feels about it.

...Okay she is sure how she feels about it. She likes it. A lot. Morality be damned, endorphins are a wonderful thing. And if she's going to be asked to choose between spending her evenings making out with a pirate or awkwardly fobbing off her advances, she sure is hell is going to go along with the kissing.

Mindfang's lips are rough against hers as she deepens the kiss, noticing her partner's mental distraction. Her hands slipping down to her shoulders, fingernails scraping ever so slightly against her skin, making Rosa shiver. Mindfang grins, victoriously. When her tongue brushes Rosa's lips, Rosa still isn't one hundred percent sure what to do. Things aren't as instinctive as soppy romance literature had led her to believe, and while she's doing her best some things are impossible to discern.

So she pulls back and asks softly: "Um. What do I--?"

Mindfang takes a deep breath, stifling whatever impatient reply was about to fly off her lips. The moment of composure is, however, not as calming as it probably was intended to be. "Well you could start by getting those gorgeous hands of yours on me instead of just letting them lie there like dead fish."

"Oh. Um-- I'm sorry--" Rosa reaches up with shaking hands and curls her fingers around Mindfang's waist. Permission is, apparently, not needed. Although she was, perhaps, correct to worry about the long-term implications of touching her. Mindfang lets out a soft, satisfied purr and smiles.
When she leans in once more to kiss her, Rosa lets out a squeak and quickly interrupts. "But. But what do I do when your-- I mean-- your tongue--"

This time, Mindfang doesn't seem half as annoyed, a condescending smirk twitching her eyebrows up. Her icy fingers, slowly warming against Rosa's skin, gently stroke her neck, in slow, even movements. "Just open your mouth and let me do the rest."

"Is that really all--"

"Shhhh, and behave you gorgeous little minx." Mindfang shoves Rosa against the wall and slips onto the bed, situating the pillows so that Rosa's in less danger of chipping a horn on the paneling. Her hands make their way back around Rosa's neck, stroking her hair. "Don't ask so many questions, hmm? Just kiss me."

"Oh. Um. Is that really all?" Rosa isn't sure what she wants the answer to be. She's struggling enough as is to keep her breathing normal, wanting to arch her neck into Mindfang's hand and convey how desperate she is to be touched. She likes being touched. Sure this wasn't what she wanted to talk about, and that's-- of course-- very frustrating. But this is an... acceptable interlude before an inevitably awkward conversation. Mindfang looms over her, softly illuminated in the failing light of a crescent moon. Rosa counts to three on her inhale and exhale, forcing herself to remain very calm as Mindfang crawls into her lap, leaving her no venue for escape.

"Yes." She kisses her, fingers cradling Rosa's jaw. Rosa makes a noise that, in rude company, could be considered a moan. Mindfang echoes the sound. "No." She pulls away, suddenly doubting her self-control, diving back in and then-- before they can kiss again-- pulling back. "Maybe. Yes. Yes, that's all for now." Instead of going to kiss her once more, Mindfang simply rests her head curve of Rosa's neck. Her face is colder than her hands and Rosa wants to shudder away, but instead wraps a timid arm around her shoulders. She's a surprisingly delicate woman when she's close to you, bones like a bird's jutting out at every angle beneath flowery clothes that disguise slender bone structure and a buxom figure. She doesn't seem at all physically suited to her profession, but Rosa's heard her talk about the ocean over a glass of wine, her voice soaring and dropping like a seagull on the updrafts and knows that, sometimes, a passion for the work is reason enough to overcome physical inadequacy.

"Do you ever want to punch everyone in the world in the face?" Mindfang asks, quietly, not opening her eyes.

"Yes."

"Good. Because I kind of do too." Mindfang nuzzles closer and lets out a shuddering sigh. "God I hate my job. Can't I just kill everyone? I mean. It wouldn't take that long. A few twitches of the eye and I could make every single one of them throw themselves overboard."

Rosa stiffens. Her eyes go wide and she stares up at the ceiling. Without meaning to her fingers clench over the back of Mindfang's coat and her Mistress lets out a grunt of protest before she relaxes her grasp. Oh. Oh god. She's-- she's--

"You're... Cerulean, then?" She asks, softly, being incredibly sure to inflect the syllables properly so that she does not convey the sudden fear gripping her.

"Oh? Huh. Yeah. Yeah, I am."

"...Oh."
"Uuuuuuuugh, Fussyfangs. Don't be so... so... serious." Mindfang rolls over onto her back, flailing a little before she gets comfortable lying against her. She pulls Rosa down towards her, their lips meeting at a clumsy angle. "I'm not going to kill them."

Rosa can't find the words for the disquiet forming in her gut. Oh god, oh god. "Have you?"

"Have I what?"

"Have you." She can't say it. She doesn't want to hear the answer. But she needs to know, she must know. "Have you made people kill themselves?"

"Mmmm, no. That'd be a fuckton of paperwork, Pet. Not to mention annoying as fuck to replace someone mid voyage. And, oh fuck, do you have any idea how annoying the rest of them would get? 'Oh god what if we're all being totally mind controlled into doing everything and feeling things just because she's making us!'." Mindfang accompanies her rant with a wrinkled nose and flamboyant hand gestures that are, apparently, meant to mimic particular sailors. "It's annoying as fuck. If I'm going to manipulate someone I'm not about to do it so stupidly. I mean. Fuck. I'm amaaaaaaaazing at what I do. Not like they'd even know I was doing it."

"Is that so, Mistress?" Rosa wants to shove her out of her lap immediately. She wants to shove her out of her lap and run like hell. Oh god. Oh god-- what if-- what if everything's been feeling-- everything she's been thinking-- everything-- Fuck-- No. Not that. That's a terrible word. But. Fuck. This is terrible. She feels like she's been smacked in the head with an anchor.

Is this why she's here? Really? Really? To be... manipulated into keeping Mindfang company? Because-- well-- fuck.

Suddenly the world is closing in and it's impossible to breathe. She tightens the fingers of the hand that's not discomfittedly stroking Mindfang's shoulders around the quilt and breathes in deeply through her nose. Mindfang notices her distress and rolls her eyes again. Apparently it's not hard to discern the source of her discomfort because Mindfang jabs her sharply in the shoulder and huffs. "Oh don't give me that face, Pet. If I wanted to manipulate you, you'd be in my bed already."

"Is that a fact, Mistress?" She snaps, a little more harshly than she means to.

"Don't worry about it. It's no fun doing things that way. And besides." Mindfang kisses her again. This time, Rosa doesn't attempt to prolong it. "You'd notice."

"Would I?"

"I mean. Yeah. If I didn't keep it up all the time. And trust me, that is fucking stressful. You can't sleep unless the other person is sleeping, you can't let them out of your span of attention-- I mean, seriously, get drunk off your ass one night and then a bunch of ship wrangling zombies suddenly become sentient and murder you."

"Oh, that sounds dreadful. My sincerest sympathy for your plight, Mistress."

"I'm really more of an empath anyways; I prefer the subtle manipulation over the reshuffling of the deck, so to speak. And it gives you a headache."

"Joking. I'm joking." Mindfang snorts, louder, macabrely, and sits up. "Ugh. You don't believe me, do you?"

"I must admit to not being particularly convinced, Mistress."

Mindfang turns to give Rosa her worst glare, crossing her legs with a sniff and an awkward flourish.
of her petticoats. For a few moments Rosa's distracted enough to consider how lovely it would be to pull of that coat and get a good look at what's an assuredly beautiful dress beneath her coat.

"Okay, first of all, zombie thing never happened to me, okay? Happened to my ancestress. She was kind of... well... she was a head case. My ancestral manor is entirely decorated in skulls. It's not pretty and, second of all--"

She breaks off suddenly and, after a few moments, Rosa turns to give her a quizzical stare. The flow of diatribe has ceased? It's a miracle. But... well...

Rosa frowns. Suddenly, it feels like... it feels... it feels so nice. So nice and tingly. Like her insides have been coated with velvet. It's lovely. Incredibly lovely. What was she worrying about, again? What was the issue? She can't recall. Because, oh heavens, she feels wonderful. This is better than a hot bath. Or perhaps better than sex? She wouldn't know. But if this is what sex feels like she definitely needs to reconsider her stance on abstinence.

Wait. She did that already, didn't she? Because how can she say no to-- ohhhh mmmm that's nice. Rosa exhales softly and her eyes drift shut. Without seeming to think about it, she's stretching out across the bed, draping herself over Mindfang's lap and squirming delightedly.

"Ohhhhh..." She breathes out. Mmm. She opens her eyes with a smile and mmmmmm oh god there's Mindfang and-- mmmm-- look at her eyes, those are beautiful eyes, so blue like the ocean-- and--

She sits up slowly, as if she's been melted and is trying to build her spine back together vertebrae by vertebrae. Ohhh god mm she fits so nicely in Mindfang's lap-- and she's so warm-- and-- mmm-- she wraps her arms around Mindfang's neck and the warm, velvety feeling grows stronger. It grows so strong that she can't think straight and before she knows it she's kissing her. Mindfang moans, loudly, which is probably due to the fact that she's just hit her horns very hard against the wall and Rosa ignores her because oh god this is amazing--

And then...

It's not. It's not at all. Things go cold almost immediately and she goes taut in a split second. She breaks off the kiss with a sharp gasp and tries to scramble out of Mindfang's lap. Mindfang's still holding her, however, and won't let go.

"--And second of all," She snarls, right into Rosa's ear, breath hot like dragon fire against her skin. "That's mind control."

"Please..." She gasps, scrabbling frantically at Mindfang's shoulders. "Please, oh god please-- don't-- don't-- no-- please, I won't, I promise I'll be good--"

"Ugh, shut up, you're fine."

"How can you just--"

"Easy. I mean, really easy. I just think about it and things just happen to other people." She says disinterestedly, rolling her eyes and settling back against the wall, Rosa still forcibly cuddled against her. "Not with you, though, actually. That took a bit of work. Usually only happens when--" She pauses, giving Rosa a considering stares. "Never mind. But it's no fun that way. I mean, fuck that. Where's the fun in getting your own way all of the time without any consequence? I mean. Fucking seriously. That's boring."

Rosa has to take a deep breath before she can speak. It's taking every drop of her self-control not to begin screaming. "I don't appreciate the sentiment, Mistress, but I do appreciate the thought." She
says, still shaking and clawing at Mindfang's arms. "Please-- just-- please, please, Mistress--"

"I'm not letting you go until you calm down."

Okay. That's it. She snarls, digging her fingernails into her jacket. The fabric's thick enough to keep her from finding skin, but Mindfang winces all the same. "Why do you care? If you can just make me do whatever the fuck you want--"

"Oi, language! And second of all, I just told you-- I don't want to." Mindfang wraps her arms around her tightly, pinning her hands to her sides. "So just... calm the fuck down, Pet. You're the one who didn't believe me in the first place so I don't see what you're bitching about."

"You used my body--" She hisses, drawing her lips back enough to show her fangs, which takes a lot of work considering that they're not particularly remarkable at the moment.

"Yes, yes, I used your body without your consent to do something you wanted to do, oh my god I am such a monster, you should burn me at the stake for being a sorceress." She arches a dismissive eyebrow and snarls. "Be a good girl and stop pouting, hmmm?"

"I-- I--" Rosa fights to get her hands back. Mindfang won't relinquish them and the more she struggles the more she frowns. "Let me GO!"

"No, I really don't think so, Pet."

"Please, Mistress!" She begs, voice cracking. Rosa feels tears pricking at the backs of her eyes and struggles to choke them back. "Please. Don't--"

Mindfang snorts and rolls her eyes for what seems to be the hundreth time, staring up at the ceiling as if some higher power will give her strength. "Ugghh you're fussing again. Don't try the pathetic kicked dog thing on me, okay? Just take a deep breath and calm the fuck down."

Rosa breathes in through her nose, a deep shuddery breath that shakes down through her ribcage. Mindfang watches her critically, blue eyes still deep and brilliant and perfect--

Well. Hmm. That's different. Not different from hours before, but different from minutes ago when she couldn't think past her own brain, the sensation of warmth spreading up her spine as she did what her brain told her to. No, this is different and clearly free from whatever it was Mindfang can do with that gorgeous gaze of hers.

"That's it, darling. That's it." She says quietly, giving Rosa a tense smile. "Pet, that's no way to react, huh? I've got better things to do, my beautiful girl, than to rip your brain to shreds."

"That's not as comforting as you think." Rosa mutters, looking away abruptly. Mindfang groans, loudly, and shoves Rosa out of her lap. She topples off the bed with a loud 'oof' of breath rushing out of her lungs. With a melodramatic roll of her eyes, she kneels down on the floor, her gorgeous coat swirling around her in a flurry of black wool and blue silk. She takes one of Rosa's hands into her own and looks as solemn as she can. The effect is ruined by the fact that she's still glowering at Rosa.

"Fine, Miss Fussybritches--"

"Why do you keep calling me--"

"You keep fussing at me, that's why." Mindfang snarls, showing her fangs. They're gorgeous fangs, really. But they're frighteningly sharp in the moonlight. "Okay. You're clearly upset by my little parlor trick, ok? I get it. I really do. You've spent fuck knows how long being brutalized by people..."
who want to sell you piecemeal to the highest bidder or whatever the fuck it is they do--"

"You're really not being at all sensitive--"

"I'm talking." Mindfang grumbles, narrowing her eyes. "I just wanted to tell you that I won't do it again, okay? I won't. Captain's honor."

"You're a pirate." Rosa says in a quiet, pointed whisper.

Mindfang huffs and drops her head onto Rosa's knees, pouting. It's an adorable expression on her, making her look years younger and far sweeter. "Okay, so maybe that's not the best thing to say. But... you know. I'm not going to do it again. So stop freaking the fuck out."

"Is that a promise?" She asks, softly, and her voice cracks.

"Fuck, you're really not going to let me live this down are you?" Mindfang rolls her eyes and sighs, heavily. "Okay. Okay, darling. I promise. I promise never again to use my biologically gifted skills to manipulate your psyche. However, I do reserve the right to utilize other forms of psychological warfare as I see fit."

"Fair enough, Mistress." Rosa murmurs, relaxing a little. But only physically, her mind still testing every inch of her thoughts to ensure that they remain her own. Mindfang brightens at this perceived surrender, giving Rosa a brilliant smile.

"Good girl." Mindfang gets up slowly, her knees clearly stiff. "So. On that... note... um... I think I'm going to leave you here for a bit to calm down, hmmm..."

She turns to the door, straightening her coat as she goes. Before Mindfang can get out the door Rosa lunges for the hem of her coat and tugs, hard. Mindfang lets out an audible sigh and turns her head, slowly.

"What now, Pet?"

Well. Emotional blackmail can be a powerful thing, right? "...Mistress, do you think perhaps I might be able to leave the room sometime?"

"Sweetheart, as much as I adore you and those gorgeous lips of yours, at the moment I'm really not in the mood to indulge... well... anything. So maybe we should just pretend you never asked me that and try again later... when I'm in a better mood?"

"...Oh." She says, staring at her hands. Perhaps it's not a powerful thing. "Oh. My apologies, Mistress."

"And stop it with the face, you know I'm just going to get drunk and be madly in love with you again by tomorrow morning." Mindfang doesn't turn to look back at her, so Rosa isn't entirely sure how her Mistress realizes what her face looks like. Perhaps she's predictable?

She shuts the door and locks it with a loud finality that makes Rosa shudder away from the door. When she’s sure Mindfang’s not coming back she collapses onto her mattress and finally, finally starts to cry. She pulls the quilt and blankets and sheets up over her head and huddles beneath them, using her pillows as a blockade. Oh god. Oh god. Just when she began to thought that things were improving in her life—

The door swings open.
“Okay. Yeah. I thought so.” Mindfang sounds exhausted. When she steps into the room once more—has it even been five minutes?—she’s dragging her boot heels and muttering under her breath.

Of course. Of fucking course. She wants to bite the hand that snakes under the blankets to pat her on the head, sapphire rings and all. She wants to sink her teeth in until they meet bone and possibly rip a few fingers off. Hell, why stop at a few fingers! Why not go for the whole arm! But she doesn’t. Instead she shies away from the touch until she’s at the foot of the bed and has nowhere else to retreat to. That’s when she lashes out. Mindfang seems to anticipate this and grabs her by the horn, hauling her out from beneath her nest of blankets like she weighs nothing at all. It’s painful, but not nearly as painful as it probably would have been if she’d actually bit her.

“Come along, Pet.” She says, softly, pulling her into her arms again. Rosa knows for a fact that she’s not smaller than the woman currently cuddling her to her chest like she’s a stray cat. She’s stood next to her several times now, and she’s easily a few inches taller if Mindfang weren’t always in heeled boots. But as far as physical build goes, she’s absolutely emaciated and that’s what makes all the difference. Mindfang is sinuously built, a born burglar—she consists of muscle and scar tissue built up of years scrabbling away and winning her battles. Rosa remembers feeling like that. Invincible, powerful, so sure nothing in the world could take her down. And… Well…

Now she’s here. Sobbing hysterically in the arms of a woman who can, quite literally, control every beat of her heart and the cadence of every thought to traverse her mind. God knows if anything she’s doing is of her own volition. All that she has to confirm it is the word of a notorious pirate. She knows, quixotically, that she’s a jade blood and they are not, as a rule, subject to psychic manipulation. But that was real. Mindfang did that. Mindfang did that to her.

Mindfang pulls her a little closer, wrapping an arm around her head and pressing her lips to the base of her horn. She’s making quiet soothing noises in the back of her throat. It’s a desperate, fumbling attempt to calm her down. The noises coming out of her throat are rusty and hollow sounding, not anything like the soft trills and nervous chirps Rosa would normally expect to hear in a situation like this. It’s clear she hasn’t done much comforting in her life, or, at the very least hasn’t had the occasion to do so in a good decade or so.

But somehow, the pathetic attempts to calm her are enough. She’s still crying but she can breathe a little more and that seems to placate her Mistress a bit. She lifts her head and grumbles, “Didn’t I say to not do this? Stop. Stop leaking. Don’t do that with your face.”

She wants to apologize. In any other situation, your owner point blank informing you not to do something is a mandate to be obeyed without question. But Mindfang, despite her obvious neuroses and general lack of understanding when it comes to basic platonic interactions, is relatively non-malicious.

Ignorant, perhaps? Is that the right word? Probably not. But it sits better than "crazy manipulative bitch" on her conscience, so she chalks up a victory to fantasy.

“See? This is how you know I’m not manipul8ing you.” She mutters, softly, over Rosa’s soft cries. “If I was in charge here we’d totally be having sex right now.”

Yes. Definitely not benevolent. But it’s as close to it as Rosa’s going to get, so she’ll take it—charming platitudes about the nature of sorrow and all.

“Shhhhh. You’re fine. Everything’s fine. No one’s hurt you. You’re okay, okay?”

“You’re not very good at this.”
“Shut the fuck up and be comforted.” She growls, jostling Rosa a little. It takes her a few seconds to realize that Mindfang has stood up and is attempting to balance her in her arms.

“UM. If it’s not that much of an imposition—“

“It is, don’t ask, oh my god just no. No more requests. Who’s in charge, huh?”


“Yeah, that’s right ‘of course’.” She mutters, a little less malevolently than before. “So trust me, okay?”

Rosa falls silent, curling a little closer into Mindfang’s chest in an effort to hide herself from the curious gazes of the sailors spread out across the deck. It’s just after sunset and they're just beginning to light the lanterns so, in theory, no one can see her. But Mindfang's there, warmer than usual and intimidating as-- well--

Intimidating as fuck. Pardon her troll-french. Again.

Mindfang carries her across the deck without incident, occasionally making shushing noises in the back of her throat as Rosa struggles to calm herself. Escape is not an option; she knows this now more than ever. Mindfang opens the door to her cabin with a bit of jostling that makes Rosa squeak uncomfortably and Mindfang snaps, clearly at the end of her patience. "Shut up, you're fine!".

The room is dark when they duck inside. Mindfang knows the room intimately, however, and deposits her on the couch without tripping.

"Just. Stay here and calm down, okay?"

"Why am I--?” She starts to ask, catching her breath long enough to snuffle loudly. Mindfang huffs and produces a gorgeous lace edged handkerchief. It's startling enough that she squeaks and stops crying, taking it from her with a soft hiccup.

Well. That was effective. Instead of wondering whether or not her every movement is under the control of another being, she's wondering why in fresh hell a pirate has lacy handkerchiefs. Lacy handkerchiefs sprinkled with jasmine perfume. That is. Well. Unexpected.

"Because I'm not letting you fucking sulk in the dark, okay? You're only getting out of your room because I didn't want you-- I just-- I felt bad, ok?" Mindfang's voice is soft, and she gives Rosa a tight smile. "Just take the olive branch."

"Thank you, Mistress." She says, quietly, still sniffling into her borrowed handkerchief. Mindfang groans, audibly and forcefully tilts her head back. They make eye contact somehow, Rosa staring into her ridiculous eyes upside down. From this angle the seven pupils of her left eye look even more abnormal, somehow, and a part of her wants to run, screaming, overboard. But she's seen weirder things and, well, on Mindfang it's not much of a detraction.

"Yeah. Well. You know-- kinda my fault to begin with." Mindfang sighs, heavily. "Just. Make yourself comfortable. I've got the next watch so it'll be a few hours before I can... deal with this.” She makes a weird sort of dismissive hand gesture in Rosa's direction. "Don't break anything and do whatever the fuck you want, okay?"

"...Should I just sit here then, Mistress?"

"No. Fuck no. If I wanted you to sit around and pout I'd have left you in the dark down in the hold."
"Pardon me, Mistress?" She asks, softly, the hairs on the back of her neck standing up straight. That sounded distinctly more threatening than she was expecting.

"What? It's a pirate ship. Don't you think I've got a brig down there?" She mutters, glowering at Rosa from the doorway. "Darling, take a fucking bath and have a cup of tea."

And with that not entirely cheering message, she ducks out of the room, still grumbling. She pulls on her hat as she goes, a ridiculous feathered affair that would probably be more suited to an afternoon in high society rather than several hours spent at the helm of a pirate ship.

Rosa remains still in the dark for far longer than she needs to, every minute bringing the fear that Mindfang will return. Once she feels relatively assured that the pirate will not be suddenly reappearing, she crawls to the floor and takes shelter beneath the coffee table. She screams against the carpet for what feels like an hour, shrieking until her vision becomes unsteady with a lack of oxygen. Her rage and fear fully spent, she slumps boneless against the floor, considering her options.

She can't leave. She can't resist-- or if she can, it's because Mindfang is indulging it. A very good part of her is very willing to pretend the past-- however much time has passed-- didn't happen. That she doesn't know any of this and she can feel free to flirt at will. The more world-savvy part of Rosa, the part that's still in mourning for her dead children, points out that this is utter bullshit and she should just snap Mindfang's neck. The rest of her just wants to not think about this anymore. Rosa is inclined to agree with the latter sentiment, desperately searching for distractions.

Mindfang's suggestion eventually sinks in and Rosa seizes upon it like a robin onto the dawn's first worm. A bathtub. Yes, she would like that very much. Hot water will make her feel clean, at the least, and will go farther towards making her feel battle-ready than anything else. The cabin is uncomfortably dark, and it takes a few moments of stumbling around before she finds the fireplace. There's a matchbook on the mantle, thankfully, and a basket of logs on the hearth. She throws a few into the grate along with a match.

It doesn't work as well as she'd hoped. The logs fail to catch fire and she frowns. Oh. Oh dear. She needs something to kindle it with. Rosa sighs, heavily and lights another match. She is not taking a bath in the dark. That does not seem at all advisable.

Except, well, why doesn't it? Who's going to give a damn if she takes a bath in the dark? There's a few lanterns around the room and a couple of candles on the mantle. It might be a little chilly in the room, but she's lived through worse.

She lights the lantern on the side table and lifts it, carefully. Not burning down the ship is probably more than a little advisable. The lantern's faint light casts only a few feet of glow, requiring her to wander around Mindfang's generous quarters until she discovers her intended destination. She saw the bathtub when she was searching for shoes last week, but hadn't paid it much attention. This is... Well, this is lovely. Big. Clean, somehow. Towels draped over a rack that don't smell mildewed. Incredibly lovely. And, she's disgusted to realize, an effective bribe. Who cares that she just turned her brain off when she's got a bathtub. She sets the lantern down on the wrought iron table sitting beside the tub. It casts tall shadows up the wall and flickers, but there's enough light to see by. She twists the taps on full and-- oh mother in heaven that's hot water.

She's going to cry. She's going to start crying once more over hot water. That's pathetic. She's pathetic. But, in her defense, she can't actually recollect the last time she's been truly clean and not 'jumped into a freezing river' clean. She turns the hot water tap up as high as it will go and steam immediately starts to rise. She's abandoned her disgusting clothing in a few gestures and is in the water before she can fully process the fact that she's probably going to scald herself.

The water feels heavenly, all the same. It stings to high hell, but... it's a nice sting. She groans, loud
and painfully, and sinks down to her neck. The water has a wonderful effect on her musculature and for the first time in months the tension floods out of her shoulders. Ohhhhh. Oh god. Sincerely this time-- Who cares about the pirate possibly using mind control against her when she's got a bathtub? Rosa, sluggish from the sensory overload, begins to work things out in her head. It took Mindfang a week to reveal that she's that kind of blue blood. And it's fairly obvious when she started and stopped. Of course, that could be a ploy, but Rosa knows her blood-born rights as a jade blood--mind control doesn't work on her the same way it would on anyone else. The only way it can work is when the mental suggestions are things you're already inclined to do, or if you're-- well-- so mentally incapacitated that your mind is basically a smoking pile of rubble. It would be a lie to say she hadn't fantasized about a more carnal relationship with Mindfang and Mindfang is clearly nothing if not brutally honest (as far as her 'comforting' mechanisms are concerned). Rosa tentatively takes her at her word, uneasy with the decision but unwilling to make more trouble for herself than she has to.

There's a bar of soap on the table beside her lantern ('her' lantern, like she owns anything) and sniffs it curiously. It's not one hundred percent to her liking, a little too spicy and not nearly floral enough. But it's soap, even if it smells like sandalwood instead of something sensible like lavender. Who doesn't use lavender soap? Everyone uses lavender soap-- it's a rule of the world.

Okay, it's not really a rule of the world. But she'd really love it if Mindfang had lavender soap. Still, she drops it into the bathtub and starts to scrub herself off. Who knows the next time she'll be able to have a bath?

Even in the dingy lantern light she can tell that the water's already gone a rather unpleasant grey color. Ugh that's disgusting. Rosa scrubs at her arms until they're raw, her flesh going silvery-green before the blood rapidly flows away from the surface. The soap is nice and probably expensive, given the fact that it leaves her skin soft and clean and oh god is that heavenly. Soon the water is covered in a thin film of soap above the grime, looking like a bizarre rainbow in the flickering lantern light.

She slips her head underwater with a gasp as the hot water covers her head. Having damp hair is a disturbingly unusual feeling and as she washes it out with the soap-- it would appear that Mindfang does not believe in shampoo-- Rosa realizes for the first time that her hair hasn't been trimmed in ages.

Ugh. Ugh ugh ugh she's a mess. How in the world has Mindfang been tolerating her? She washes out her hair with a few head swishes underwater and resurfaces with a quick breath. That's nice. That's incredibly nice.

Okay. There. Done. All clean. She sits up in the bathtub and takes a deep breath. Right then, Rosa. Time to get out of the bath.

...Or maybe she can drain out the dirty water and pretend she'd just gotten in the bath if Mindfang asks? That's a thing, right? She can get away with that. With a furtive glance at the cabin door, she pulls the plug from the bath. The water drains out in the course of several minutes and as the last bit of it swirls away, Rosa turns the faucet back on and lets the bath fill up once more.

Yes. Well. No one ever said she had to stop at one bath. A woman needs time to bask every once in a while.

* * *

She's relatively sure she's been in the tub for an hour by the time she decides it's acceptable to get
out. The water has gone to the point where it's uncomfortably lukewarm and she feels a little bad filling the tub up a third time. Who knows who else uses hot water on this ship?

Well. Considering that it's a pirate ship, probably only Mindfang. But, well, it never hurt anyone to be courteous. So she drains the tub once more and climbs out. There's barely enough light in the lantern for her to see beyond the immediate vicinity, but there's just enough to prevent her night vision from kicking in. Thankfully, she finds the towels easily and bundles them around her. Now that she's out of the water, the room is freezing and she's beginning to regret the idea of bathing without lighting a fire. Oh, to hell with it. With a frown she picks up her commandeered lantern and pads over to the fireplace. Without further preamble she huffs it out, pours the lantern oil into the fireplace and tosses in a match. This time, the fire goes up with a flourish, rising nearly high enough to touch the mantle. Nothing other than the logs catches fire, however-- it's the little things to be grateful for. After a few minutes she's got a cheerful blaze going that lights up the room and makes things feel a little less desolate.

...And now she doesn't have anything to do. Rosa sighs, heavily. Well that's that. All alone on a pirate ship and she's still really bored. This is... well... it's almost disrespectful, isn't it? She should at least pretend to still be terrified, instead of mildly mutinous.

She perches on the edge of the coffee table and starts to dry herself off. The fire's blessedly warm and she shifts a little closer to it. Would she get in trouble for sleeping on the hearth? Probably not. She'd be rather out of the way there, not disturbing anyone--

Is that a pair of scissors on the vanity? Yes, it's a pair of scissors. And over there's a comb. Being used as a bookmark-- deep breaths Rosa, it's ok.

This is probably a bad idea. Probably a very bad idea. But, well-- she could really use a haircut. It takes only a few minutes of deliberation to decide that no harm can come of it. She sits, timidly, at the vanity, staring at her own reflection. She looks exhausted and gaunt, her eyes ringed in evergreen shadows and cheekbones standing out in a way that, while aesthetically pleasing, does not indicate that she's a picture of health. Her hair, however, is the worst offender, hanging haphazardly to her ears. She's worn it short since she was 18 and didn't intend to stop-- it's a matter of principle, at this point. Determined not to be swayed by her own depressing reflection, Rosa begins lopping off several inches all around with the aid of a hand mirror that really needs a good polish. After years of cutting her own hair, she's able to do it relatively habitually, and, when she finally finishes, is glad to recognize the woman she remembers herself as in the mirror. Still a little more broken looking, perhaps, but she can see the determinedly stubborn angle of her ears, still scarred with holes from piercings long-sealed, and the glimmer of rebellion rekindling somewhere deep in her pupils. She runs her fingers through her hair and it stays the way she wants it. It's short, and nothing different from her usual, but she'll be damned if it doesn't make her happier than she's been in ages. She feels tentatively pretty, if she ignores how uncomfortable her damp collar is or how chafed her wrists still are from months spent in shackles, even after several days carefully wrapped up in bandages.

It's the little victories, Rosa, she tells herself, running Mindfang's comb through her hair once more and smiling wider than a simple home haircut should merit.

Eventually, though, she's not content sitting at the mirror staring at herself. She's cold and the damp towel twined around her isn't helping matters much. With a heavy sigh she twists around in on the vanity's ottoman and glances around the room. In the general mess it's hard to discern anything-- there's clothes draped around in the strangest places and books seem to have piled up on every free space. Not to mention dice-- why does she have so many dice? Rosa eventually spies a dressing gown hanging off of a coat rack. It's clearly Mindfang's, cut from an exquisite blue silk with intricate gold embroidery. It's probably not acceptable behavior to steal her Mistress's clothing, all things
considered, but... but...

No one can blame her for not wanting to put that damn dress back on. It's degrading. And she won't do it. Even if it means being beaten. So she pulls Mindfang's dressing gown on slowly, the silk slipping over her skin like the water in the bath.

Oh god why don't they make all clothing out of this silk? It's wonderful. Absolutely wonderful. Rosa wraps it around her and it's big-- a little too loose and a little too long, falling almost to her ankles, but it's... it's fantastic.

Once she's properly clothed-- or at least, as properly clothed as she's going to get without putting that disgusting dress back on-- Rosa crosses the room to the fireplace. Without further preamble she pulls a throw pillow off the couch, places it on the hearth and curls up on the area rug just before the flames.

Not a productive use of time, no. But it's warm down here, warm and delectable. Is it pathetic that she's curled up like a cat? Probably. There's no telling, however, the next time she'll get the chance to be warm and clean. Mindfang's ridiculously indulgent-- for the moment. She'll take the amenities while she can get them.

What in the world is she doing here? Honestly. To look good? She doesn't, really. With a bit of lipstick and some more weight on her bones, she's sure she'd be reasonably attractive, but at the moment she looks more like a corpse than anything. She's not doing anything useful, not helping anyone-- she doesn't need to be here.

She's useless. Nothing better than a space filler. Perhaps she can be used as a paperweight? Or a rug warmer. Perhaps a rug warmer. Yes, she can do that.

And with that thought she falls asleep, determined to stop thinking about everything for the moment.

* * *

When Mindfang slips back into the room, it must be close to midnight. Rosa wakes, blearily, at the sound of the door unlocking, still sprawled out before the fire on the marble hearth, stolen robe wrapped around her.

"...Made yourself at home, have you?" Mindfang mutters after an awkward silence, raising her eyebrows. She's looming in the doorway with her neck craned and looks more than a little ridiculous. Rosa sits up a little bit, blinking slowly at her, and then nods, sleepily.

"Did you steal my dressing gown? And cut your hair? I mean-- You've been alone for what, two hours?"

"Well, Mistress. You told me to do what I wanted."

"So you steal my clothes and sleep in front of my fireplace?"

Rosa sits up a little more, pulling her legs beneath her. She hopes she looks as elegant in the firelight as she feels, robe parted just enough that her neck is visible. Mindfang seems to be appreciating the view, at least, because she hasn't looked away. "If I might be so bold, Mistress, considering that I am also your property, I've hardly stolen your clothing, I've simply... moved your belongings into closer proximity to another."

"Looks good on you." Mindfang sighs, heavily, and rubs at her temples. She shuts her cabin door and locks it without looking, her hands familiar with the mechanism. The deadbolt clicks into place
with a finality that's surprisingly non-terrifying.

Rosa yawns. Mindfang pads over to her bar and fills a tumbler of rum. She glances over at her shoulder at Rosa and makes a quizzical face, clearly making a further peace offering. Rosa shakes her head and Mindfang huffs, filling a glass anyways. She takes a seat at her desk, kicking off her boots with a yawn and tossing her hat on the floor. Once she's comfortably settled she casts Rosa a glare.

"Well. Aren't you going to come say hello?" She mutters, petulantly, pointedly refusing to acknowledge the awkwardness from hours before.

Rosa gets up slowly, crossing the cabin with timid steps. She folds her arms in front of her, eager to keep the robe shut and as modest as she can. It's determined to fall off her shoulders every time she moves and Rosa wonders, for a moment, if this is intentionally done-- and, when the thought occurs, she's suddenly incredibly intoxicated by the mental image of Mindfang wearing it instead. If she had Mindfang's aplomb, she'd let the damn thing fall to the floor and use the other woman's obvious attraction to her as an advantage. For the moment, though, she'd really prefer not to flash her Mistress. How her Mistress feels about this is unknown but, well-- whatever. She's tired. And getting a bit irritated that Mindfang thinks all is forgiven.

Mindfang hands her the other glass with a frown and taps the edge of her desk. When Rosa fails to respond as is apparently requested she huffs, places her own glass on the desktop and curls her hands around Rosa's waist. With a slight snarl and the slight twinge of fingernails digging into her hips through the fabric of the robe, Mindfang urges her up onto the edge of the desk and-- finally, with Rosa sitting before her, she smiles.

"My my, Pet, don't we clean up nicely?" Mindfang says, quietly, reaching forward and brushing her fingers through Rosa's hair. Rosa hums noncommittally and shrugs, picking up her glass. She pointedly refuses to acknowledge Mindfang's touch or the compliment, choosing instead to seem relatively absorbed in the wallpaper. Mindfang gently attempts to make Rosa look at her, but she immediately absorbs herself in the contents of her glass, downing it in a few swallows. Mindfang smirks.

"Girl after my own heart."

She shrugs and crosses her legs. Mindfang watches her with wide eyes, her breath whisking in sharply.

"...Darling, I don't suppose you're angry with me, are you?"

"Of course not, Mistress." She says with a forced smile. "Why would I be upset?"

"Mmm, if you wish, we'll play it that way, Pet." Mindfang finishes her own glass of rum and then produces another bottle from her desk, refilling both their glasses. "Are you always this passive aggressive?"

"Yes, Mistress, I'm afraid I am." Another glass down. Damn. Since when does she drink like this? Maryam, I'm ashamed at you. What happened to your morals? Lost them along with your kid, probably. Oh. Oh dear, now I'm sad.

Mindfang huffs, and rolls her eyes. "Fine. I'm sure I can occupy my time until you deign to speak to me." She pulls a book off her desktop and opens it, clearly intending on reading until Rosa decides to be happy with her. Well. That's. One way to play this? Rosa waits for a few awkward minutes, nursing her third beverage.
"Do you have any particular... reason to be keeping me around?" Rosa asks, shifting nervously at the edge of the desk. Mindfang looks up from the book in her lap with a frown. She meets Rosa's eyes and raises a single perfect eyebrow.

Instead of answering the question, she leans forward and runs a hand between the slit in her robe. Against Rosa's chilled skin Mindfang's touch is, for once, warm. She doesn't look away from her, though, carefully maintaining eye contact.

"Why am I keeping you around, Pet?" Mindfang asks quietly. Rosa nods. The fire snaps twice, each sound making Rosa twitch. "Do you really not know?"

"...Sex?" Mindfang snorts and leans in, knocking their horns together. The gesture is one that Rosa recognizes from watching the little ones down in the cavern, and even more so from her own childhood, affectionate head butts and nuzzles shared between kids too young to understand what it truly meant to be a moirail but trying their best all the same. She also recognizes that Mindfang's staring at her with undisguised affection, eyes bright and excited. Any second now Rosa expects her to chirp and let out a purr. For a pirate, she really isn't that fearsome. Or perhaps she's doing her best to conceal that side from Rosa's immediate awareness? If so, she's failed very spectacularly on several recent occasions.

That thought is oddly reassuring.

"If that's not the case, Mistress," She says softly, this time reaching up and brushing a few locks of Mindfang's hair away from her face. She nudges into Rosa's touch, still smiling her wickedly innocent grin. "Then I fail to see why you're retaining my services."

She rolls her eyes-- again, honestly, does she ever stop rolling her eyes?-- and makes a dismissive gesture, rings flashing in the light from the candles. The hand on Rosa's leg shifts a little and she trails her fingers up and down her skin in a way that makes her muscles tremble. Her insides feel like they're trying to melt their way out between her thighs. It's a shockingly lovely sensation, to tell the truth. She suspects it could get even better with the correct application of physical contact. It's vastly different than whatever Mindfang did to her before, and it occurs to Rosa that, perhaps, she was made to feel what Mindfang herself was feeling. Right now, Rosa wants to slip off of the desktop into Mindfang's lap, sprawling out across the floor and begging for Mindfang to-- to-- god knows. Something sexual, probably.

Mindfang smirks. She's gorgeous when she smirks. It's something Rosa shouldn't like-- logically that expression can't bode well. But. She's devilishly attractive, with her eyes gleaming and her skin like steel. "Can't a woman of noble birth simply indulge her need to be surrounded by persons of quality?"

"Of course, Mistress, but I would hardly call myself a person of quality." She tilts her head to one side and raises an eyebrow. Mindfang clearly understands the indication and with a huff reaches up to straighten her collar. Rosa flinches back a little and Mindfang withdraws her touch.

"Sweetheart, I'm not stupid. You're not stupid. Let's not play this game." Mindfang moves closer. So close that Rosa can feel her breath on her neck. It's warm and exhilarating, spreading up from her ear to the nape of her neck. She's glad she just clambered out of the bath because, for once, she doesn't feel ridiculously unattractive. She can still smell the soft aroma of Mindfang's soap against her skin, warm and spicy. It's not floral like she'd prefer, but it's still pleasant enough and-- more importantly-- she's clean, which makes this encounter less embarrassing.
"I thought you liked playing games, Mistress?" She asks, her voice dropping to a husky timbre she didn't know she was capable of. Mindfang's eyes go wide and then narrow. Her smirk widens and Rosa can feel herself starting to color.

"Oh, I like playing games. And I'm rather fond of the game we're playing right now." Yes, there's her hand wandering again, drifting away from her leg to grasp her hip. "But, my darling little pet..."

"I'm not that little, you know."

"Oh, no, darling, you're not." Mindfang raises her eyebrows and gives Rosa a slow once over, her eyes lingering intensely on her breasts. It's more than obvious what she's implying and Rosa's not sure how she likes that, but, well, it is flattering. "I'm just being affectionate, Pet."

"Of course, Mistress."

"But I have two eyes, darling. Well. Eight eyes, if we count this as more than one-- I can see you as plain as daylight on the waves. You blush at the drop of a pin, you know, and you bruise like a peach. Now, I don't like confrontation--"

Rosa snorts a little. Mindfang shoots her a dirty look, showing her fangs.

"--So I'm going to ask you to tell me. You're a green blood, hmm?"

She inhales sharply and stifles the urge to shake her head in denial. "Yes, Mistress. I am"

"And I suppose you'd say you're closer to being a blue blood than a yellow blood?"

"I suppose that's correct, Mistress."

"And I'd hardly categorize you as teal. Or turquoise. Or, well, anything in that little range. And you're not hunter or pine or olive--"

"I see what you're driving at, Mistress. And while I'd enjoy listening to you rattle of shades of green for the rest of the night, I'm not sure how comfortable I am publicly stating--"

"It's not going to leave this room, Pet." She says, softly, so softly that Rosa has to lean forward to hear her. Their foreheads brush and it's like a shot of static electricity between them. Rosa wants to pull away, but forces herself to stay put. Mindfang's not staring her down, but her gaze is intense and almost hypnotic. She's not a woman you say 'no' to easily, even if she doesn't own every inch of skin covering your bones. Even when she's not controlling your every thought.

All the same, there's words you don't want to say. Staring at her and acknowledging to her Mistress's face 'yes, I'm a disgrace', 'yes, I'm a failure', 'yes I let everyone down' is more than she can bear.

So she closes her eyes and looks away. "If you require me to say it--"

"That would be preferable, yes." Mindfang takes her by the chin and turns her head back. Without meaning to Rosa flinches, sharply, away from her touch. Mindfang lets out an irate huff and then whispers: "Trust me, Pet."

And she does. Not entirely, of course, because that would make her... well... a moron. But, considering current company? There can't be much to fear for being truant from the empire. She clenches her fingers around the silk of her borrowed robe and lets out a soft sigh. Mindfang pulls her a little closer and her nails dig into the flesh of her hip slightly.
"--I would say that, perhaps, if you have to pick between two types of green gemstones to describe my blood color, that jade would be the more... accurate stone."

It's as close to an admission as she can make. And, to her immense gratitude, Mindfang seems satisfied by it. She shifts back into her chair, slipping her hand out from beneath the robe.

"Good to know. I'd hate to buy you mismatching jewelry."

Rosa doesn't respond. She folds her hands in her lap and stares down at them. As the awkwardness grows, Mindfang reaches out and takes her hands. She's cold now, as Rosa's skin heats up from tense anxiety, but it's nice to touch someone all the same.

"What's wrong now, Pet?"

"...Is that going to be an issue?" She asks, finally, and Mindfang laughs. She's gorgeous when she laughs. A little maniacal-- more than a little maniacal, really-- but she drops her head back and her shoulders relax.

"Oh. No. Not in the slightest. I just thought it might be better to be on the same page about things."

She sighs, quietly, and raises Rosa's hands to her lips, kissing her knuckles softly. It's a needlessly chivalrous gesture, but one that makes Rosa flush and squirm all the same.

"I don't know how you ended up in a slave market halfway across the world from where you belong, Pet, and I'm not going to ask. But suffice to say, what's important for you to know is that I intend to keep you in my care."

Rosa has no words. Her heart feels like it's beginning to swell and suddenly breathing hurts her like nothing has before. While Mindfang has no altruistic reasons to keep her close, the knowledge that she's safe-- even for a little while-- is enough to break her heart.

So she slips off of the desk and into Mindfang's lap, curling around her. Her head slips beneath the Captain's chin without too much unnatural wrangling and her arms fit perfectly around her shoulders. Mindfang trills nervously beneath her touch. It's a ridiculously endearing sound, going up almost an octave. Is this how romance always works? With soft touches and little noises? She sort of hopes so. Rosa nudges her neck with her nose and lets out a low trill of her own. Her voice is lower than Mindfang's but without the same range. Mindfang doesn't seem to mind, though.

Come to think of it, she doesn't seem to mind much of anything. It's... it's kind of a nice change. Her interim caretakers-- if caretaker is a word you can use to describe a slave trader-- were rather exacting individuals. Do this, do that, I'll cut your head off you bitch. That sort of thing. But Mindfang? So long as Rosa's willing to curl up in her lap and kiss her, Mindfang doesn't seem like she could care less about anything she does. Come to think of it, Rosa wonders if she could get away with brushing her hair. Mindfang's that is. Her own is now so short that brushing it would only serve a comedic purpose.

Maybe the hair brushing would go over better if she was naked? But which one of them should be naked? Damn. Oh god the liquor is starting to go to her head, isn't it? Jussssssst when she was beginning to enjoy things.

"You look confused, Pet." Mindfang says, finally, tugging softly at Rosa's hair until she drops her head back, bonelessly. They both wait for a few tense seconds before Rosa huffs, indicating impatience. Mindfang needs no further prompting, and sets in at Rosa's throat almost lazily, her neck contorting at an odd angle to lavish her throat in open mouthed kisses, fangs occasionally pinching her skin. Rosa lets her continue until she feels the situation is in danger of escalating and, using every
spare ounce of self control, pushes Mindfang away so that she can sit up properly.

"I was just... pondering... something--" Oh goodness it's getting hard to catch her breath. Minfang is determined to get her hands back beneath the dressing gown and Rosa can't seem to sit still either, shifting nervously on Mindfang's lap, towards and away from her touch. Mindfang eases the robe off her shoulder and kisses it, softly, lips lingering in a soft caress.

"Mmmm?" Oh god are those her teeth? Mother of god those are her teeth-- oh my that's tantalizing. That's positively tantalizing. Or does she mean arousing? Possibly. "And, my darling, what exactly are you... pondering?"

"Do I have to say?" She says breathlessly, wrapping her arms around Mindfang and stifling a moan in her shoulder as Mindfang bites down, softly.

"Oh, yes, now you have to." Mindfang pulls away from her and lets out a sharp breath, staring her in the eyes and smiling wickedly. "Let's hear it, Pet, hrmn?"

"Is that an order, Mistress?" Rosa asks, her voice dropping low. Mindfang's eyes snap to her and she does her best to look ashamed.

"Darling, now you're simply being petulant."

Rosa takes a deep breath and stares up at the ceiling, her hands awkwardly plucking at the lapels of Mindfang's jacket. She doesn't want to say this. She really, really doesn't. "...I was wondering which one of us would need to be naked in order for me to be able to brush your hair."

"Fu-uck." Mindfang looks like she's been punched. Rosa stifles a laugh, hiding her face. Before Rosa can stop her Mindfang's yanked the sash of the robe lose and is curling her hands around her waist. The skin on skin contact is absolutely delectable and she finds herself moving closer instead of slapping her away. Mindfang is, for once, being courteous towards Rosa's obvious sexual reticence and doesn't do more than let her hands linger where they are.

"My apologies, Mistress." She mumbles, lifting her head to give Mindfang an innocent smile.

"Yeah, you'd better be sorry." Mindfang sniffs dismissively, rolling her eyes and biting once more at Rosa's neck. She yelps and digs her fingers into her shoulders. "Making hair brushing sound sexy."

"Oh. Well. I hardly see why that's an issue."

"...Darling I'm beginning to think more and more that you're propositioning me."

"I, um-- well-- I-- really don't know, Mistress. I really haven't-- I mean--"

"I'm not going to force you to do anything, Pet." Mindfang says, as her lips travel lower and lower. "However much I want to..."

"Thank you, Mistress." She says, softly, nuzzling in close.

She pulls back suddenly, eyebrows furrowed. "...Did you use my soap?"

"Yes. But I don't like it." Rosa wrinkles her nose and sniffs, a little more haughtily than she probably should. "It smells like man. And I'm cold. And if you make me put that terrible dress back on I'll start crying and I swear to all things holy I won't stop for a good week or so."

"Fuck, you are getting spoiled aren't you?" Mindfang mutters, clapping her around the waist hard.
enough that she jumps and lets out a shriek. "C'mon. I'll find you something to wear for now, and then we'll see about getting you a proper wardrobe next time we dock."

Good to her word, Mindfang helps her to her feet. That is to say, shoves her out of her embrace. Rosa catches herself easily, regaining her balance as Mindfang waltzes across the room to her armoire.

For a pirate, she has a lot of clothing. A lot of clothing. Rosa stares, her jaw going suddenly slack. Oh. Oh my. Those are... those are gorgeous dresses. Absolutely gorgeous dresses. Why does she bother with that ridiculous coat when she has such lovely clothes?

"Here." She says, finally selecting something. From the depths of her armoire she produces a chemise. Rosa stares, her heart stopping in a matter of moments. Oh. Oh dear. She wants her to wear that? THAT?

It's short. Short and made from gorgeous black satin. It's trimmed with lace, a bow where the bust line would fall. It's not her style whatsoever, and she can't picture Mindfang in it at all. Not to say that it's ugly but, well, it's delicate and feminine and doesn't seem at all suitable for a pirate ship. Wooly long johns are appropriate nautical undergarments, not scraps of lace.

"Long story short, Pet, my Kismesis is a total dick and likes to buy me lingerie a size smaller in an effort to make me get hyper sensitive about my weight. It doesn't usually work because I wised up to it and I lie about my size so he gets me my actual size instead of the fake size and now he things I'm a lot skinnier than I really am because I always fit into his decoy lingerie--"

It's a long winded explanation that basically means that she's going to wear an incredibly sultry piece of clothing.

"--Anyways, this was from before I figured out what the fuck he was getting at. So. It's the smallest thing I own." Mindfang shrugs, a little, and does her best to look sheepish. It's not convincing. "I know it's a little... well... revealing... but?"

"Mistress, you keep informing me that you don't have any intentions against my modesty but when you open your mouth you manage to make me rather concerned for my virtue."

"You're saying words, Pet, but I can't really understand what you're saying because your breasts are fantastic."

Oh. Oh goodness. Oh goodness gracious. Rosa squeaks and goes to cover herself but-- well--

"Oh what's the use." She mutters, dropping her stolen robe. "It's better than that horrible rag I've been wearing."

Mindfang has colored a rather spectacular shade of blue and is rather carefully keeping her eyes trained on Rosa's face. Wordlessly, she extends the chemise to her. She slips it on with a sigh, luxuriating slightly in the feel of silk against her skin once more. Mmm that's still nice. Not as nice as she'd imagine sleeping in Mindfang's bed naked would be, however. Hmmm. Could she get away with that?

More importantly, how drunk is she?

"Minx." Mindfang mutters. Rosa rolls her eyes and bends down to pick up her robe.

Mindfang legs out a choked groan. Rosa stops mid-gesture and gives her a curious stare. "Yes, Mistress?"
"...What are you doing?"

"I'm picking up your robe, Mistress." She says, slowly, raising her eyebrows. "Would you prefer for me to leave it on the floor?"

"Nrrgh. No. No, that's-- um--" Mindfang covers her face with her hands and groans, loudly.

"You just saw my breasts and forgot what was happening, didn't you?"

"Yes, well. Yes. Sorry. I'm pretty damn aroused by this situation and I refuse to make any attempts to hide it."

"...Am I obligated to assist with that?" Rosa murmurs, straightening slowly and resisting the urge to cover her exposed cleavage. She folds Mindfang's robe neatly over her arm and flashes Mindfang her friendliest smile.

Mindfang takes the robe from her and settles it around her shoulders once more. Rosa smiles, slipping her arms into it and wrapping it around her like a blanket. "Darling, to be quite frank I don't think you'd be very helpful."

"No. No, I don't think so. But I'm willing to try, does that count for anything?"

With a grumble about 'abstinence only sucks', Mindfang sashays back to her desk. She retrieves her abandoned book from the floor and tosses it back onto her desk. Rosa follows her over, arms wrapped around herself protectively. Mindfang gives her another once over-- mutters something again-- and slips off her coat. She's wearing an absolutely stunning dress beneath, black velvet with a square neckline and a perfect high waist. There's a flurry of blue petticoats visible beneath, not to mention a pair of lacy tights that look suspiciously like they've been printed with spiderwebs. She looks gorgeous, attractive and harmless and definitely not a pirate.

"You need an eye patch." Rosa says, finally, yawning a little. "You really need an eye patch. You look too well-groomed to be a pirate."

"Thanks, darling." Mindfang says with an arch grin. She refills their tumblers once more and passes Rosa hers. They both drink in silence, Rosa considering the merits of requesting something a little more fruity. She ultimately decides against it, correctly assuming that if she drinks any more tonight things are going to go horribly wrong.

"I take it this means you're no longer upset with me?" Mindfang asks, finally.

Rosa shakes her head. "Nope. Still pissed."

"I was not expecting you to say that."

"In my defense, I'm drunk. Very drunk." Rosa mutters, chewing on the edge of her glass and giving Mindfang her best glare. Mindfang snorts and takes the glass away from her. "And I'll have my revenge. When you least expect it."

"...Okay, I like you drunk a lot better than you sober. I don't mean that meanly, but this is soooooooo much more fun than you crying. I mean. Just-- so much more fun."

"Actually... Actually I lied." Rosa says, slowly, examining her fingernails critically. "I'm pretty sure my revenge is going to consist of spending the rest of the night accidentally flashing you and then not realizing the effect I'm having on you."
"Acceptable revenge. I give it a B+. Very well executed although not effective for use in the long run." Mindfang gestures at her with the rum bottle. "So. Got any plans for the rest of the night?"

"You own me, Mistress." Rosa says, rolling her eyes at what is assuredly a facetious question. She flops onto the couch behind her, robe flourishing out to her sides. She crosses her legs deliberately and smirks. "My body is yours for free usage."

"Damnit." Mindfang takes a slug directly from the bottle before placing a lid on it and settling it back into her desk. She vaults over her desk in a neat maneuver and collapses across the couch, head in Rosa's lap. "You really, really suck right now, you know that-- right?"

"I'm enjoying this role reversal." Rosa murmurs, debating the merits of making out with her. It seems like a good plan. Wait. Is this her idea or Mindfang's idea? Hrm. It feels like her idea.

"I own more than one pair of handcuffs, don't tempt me." Mindfang mutters, reaching up and tugging, hard, at her collar. "I'm letting you be in charge, Pet. Don't tempt me to assert my dominance."

"...A thousand apologies, Mistress." Rosa says with a sigh, feeling some of the fight drain out of her. Well. That's that. Just when she was beginning to enjoy herself.

"Noooooooo, that face again! Stop! Stop that face or I'll shove you on the floor and make out with you until you're giggling again."

"You're really not very good at this, are you?" Rosa mutters, rolling her eyes. "You're meant to delight in my pain, find pleasure in the fact that I'm suffering and caving to your will, day by day losing track of my individuality--"

"Boring. Next idea."

"...Thank you." She says, softly, weaving her fingers into Mindfang's hair. It's still tangled and unpleasant but Mindfang responds well all the same. She squirms like a drunk cat and yawns.

"Are you really that unhappy?" She mutters, closing her eyes. "I'm doing my best, here. We're a pirate ship, not a pleasure cruise. Anyways, you're not locked in the brig, huh? So what are you bitching about."

"I know, Mistress." She says with a sigh, slumping over a little. "Thank you."

"Arrrgggh no. Stop. Just. Ignore me. I'm an interminable bitch, you'll get used to it eventually." Mindfang waves haphazardly and narrowly avoids clipping her in the face. "Darling, darling. If you need anything, please, let me know."

"I have everything I need, Mistress." Rosa says softly. Mindfang chuckles and sits up slowly. She's made herself comfortable in Rosa's lap far more quickly than she'd expected and, well... Rosa nuzzles into her shoulder with a smile.

"Urgh. I mean like normal person needs, not rescued slave person needs. I mean-- God."

"...Perhaps if you could find me something to do when you're unavailable?"

"I refuse to allow you to do any sort of physical labor or have anything to do with my men."

"I don't wish to be useless."
"You're not useless, Pet." Mindfang purrs, nudging her gently and then going in for a kiss. "You're absolutely perfect."

"But--"

"I'm sure you'll find a way to amuse yourself." Mindfang says, dismissively, kissing her again. This time Rosa leans into the kiss. Oh whatever. Fuck it all. Not like she's got anything else to do. And not like she knows anyone who's going to judge her for this.

Can't beat them, join them, correct? Mindfang moans happily and there's a pair of hands at the back of her neck. Mmmm that's nice--

Damnit all there's her tongue again. What are you supposed to do with that? Why don't they teach you these things? Shouldn't there be a book? Honestly. She knows this is partially her fault because, well, she's lived in an underground cavern for the majority of her adolescence and never attempted to make out with any of her coworkers. Not that doing so was much of an option because, well, you know-- they'd have killed her. But. Well. Still.

"I still don't know what to do with your tongue." She asks, pulling away. "I want you to explain to me once and for all what I am meant to do."

"Sweetheart, I don't mean this rudely, but if this relationship continues the way I think it's going to, you're going to be asked to do far more difficult things with your tongue."

Rosa anxiously runs a hand through her hair, doing her best not to blush. She's not at all successful. So far, Mindfang is appreciative of Rosa's rather obvious reluctance to be bedded. So far she hasn't challenged her lack of knowledge about anything sexual. But she was the proud owner of a cache of inappropriate romance novels, thank you. While none of them give great tips on making out, the sexual acts contained within were far more explicit. But letting on to this fact may not be in her best interests. So she prays that she can still lie while she's drunk. "Um... is that a sexual thing?"

Mindfang takes a sharp breath, lets out a groan, and drops her head back. Her face has gone tense in the space of a few seconds. She reaches up and pinches the bridge of her nose. "...Yes, Pet. Yes it is."

"But we're not having sex right now." Rosa says, slowly, wondering if maybe she's a little more drunk than is medically recommended because it's really hard to understand what in fresh hell is going on.

Her Mistress lets out a frustrated groan, grinding her teeth. "No, no we are not. We're kissing. And... you know. That's kind of a lot easier than sex."

"Well, yes! I would presume so." Rosa says, a little more cheerfully that Mindfang would apparently prefer, because she groans and slips out of her lap onto the floor.

She drops her head into her hands and makes a frustrated sound. "And you can't figure it out."

"I didn't realize I wasn't doing a satisfactory job." She sniffs, crossing her arms over her chest and frowning. Well. That. That hurts a lot more than it should. Humph. She hasn't had any complaints so far.

"Damnit, Rosa, that's not what I meant and you know it." Mindfang growls a little bit and makes an angry gesture towards her. She gets back onto her feet and sinks onto the couch beside her with a roll of her eyes. "We're going to give this another go, okay? And this time just... let me stick my tongue in your mouth."
Rosa clambers into her lap, Mindfang's robe slipping off her shoulders. Mindfang settles her hands around her hips and leans in, pressing her lips against the exposed skin of her shoulder. "That sounds disgusting."

"...This is one of those things you just need to trust me on, okay?" Mindfang looks like she wants to punch someone. "Just. Kiss me. And open your mouth."

"Fine." Rosa nuzzles into her, inhaling the vestiges of her jasmine perfume. Mmmm it smells better on her. Mindfang huffs and grabs her by the chin, re-centering her face. And then she kisses her.

The kiss is soft for a few moments before-- well-- oh goodness-- there's her tongue again. Ugh. Fine. Fine then. She parts her lips just a little bit. Mindfang lets out a triumphant noise and then--

Oh. Oh that is nice. That's incredibly nice. Really nice, actually. She moves closer. Oh how is she doing that, that's really quire fascinating. Mmm this is a lot better than what they've been doing all week. Warmer. Wetter, but warmer. And... well..

More intimate. Mindfang's tongue brushes hers and it's like someone's dragging their fingers down her spine. Oh god, oh GOD is that nice. She lets out a moan, wrapping her arms around Mindfang and moving in closer. Her lips are velvety smooth against her own, and when Mindfang reaches up to caress her face she reluctantly breaks away to nuzzle into it.

"Mistress--" She gasps a little bit because-- well-- goodness that's endorphins if she's ever met them. "--I think I know what you're getting at now."

"Yeah, yeah, do you know?" Mindfang grumbles, narrowing her eyes. "Shut up."

Rosa goes back to kissing her. This time she knows what she's doing and, well, that's a rather nice feeling. Mindfang tilts her head to one side and kisses her and ooh that's nice too. Rosa leans into it and then--

"Please take your hand out from beneath my clothing."

"...Take my hand out from beneath my clothing you mean?" Mindfang mutters, still kissing her. Oh god she has a nice tongue. Rosa's considering the various other places it could be applied to similar effect without breaking any vows of chastity she may or may not have taken.

She's trying to figure this out when Mindfang's hand starts to wander again. This time, she just slaps her away and keeps kissing.

"Frigid bitch." Mindfang huffs, and Rosa bares her teeth. Mindfang bares her own fangs in response before kissing her neck and biting down hard enough to elicit a squeal. "Stop being a tease."

"I'm not drunk enough to succumb to your nefarious advances, Captain."

"We can fix that."

"What happened to obtaining my consent before deflowering me?"

"Would you stop using old fashioned euphemisms for me fucking you?"

"No. No, I will not. I will use whichever euphemisms for my virginity that I feel like using because it is my virginity."

"Yeah, okay, okay, okay. I get it!" Mindfang groans, taking the opportunity to grope her. Rosa
squeaks and jolts away so quickly she falls onto the floor.

Mindfang stares down at her, perplexed, for a good minute or so and then says: "Pet, I think perhaps I should get you in bed."

"What else do I need to know how to do with my tongue and will I enjoy it anywhere near as much as I did that." She asks, a little hazily but with a wicked smirk because, well, it has to be something sexual doesn't it?

Mindfang lets out a strangled scream and points to her bed. "BED. NOW."

"...Are you going to tell me?" This is more fun than she was anticipating.

"NO. NO I AM NOT." Mindfang glowers, gets up from the couch and pulls her into her arms. Rosa's deposited on her bed in the space of a few strides. Quite literally deposited, because Mindfang drops her like a bag of rocks. She lands on the mattress in an undignified heap, blankets flying up around her.

Rosa one. Mindfang... well, she's winning. But Rosa's catching up. Oh god she's drunk.

"You're going to have to tell me eventually." She mutters drunkenly, pulling Mindfang's blankets around her. "I mean, what? I can run a revolution and massacre the majority of the imperial army, but heaven forbid someone tell me how to have decent sex."

"...What was that?"

Still standing beside the bed with her arms crossed, Mindfang looks like she's been slapped.

"Please don't take advantage of my maiden virtue simply because I'm intoxicated?"

"Yeah, yeah, that's what I thought." Mindfang mutters, groaning. She pulls the quilt and duvet out from beneath her, growling when Rosa lets out a squeak of protest. "Just-- we'll-- talk about it later, okay?"

Rosa pulls the sheets up to her chin, yawning. Oh goodness this is a much nicer bed than her little one in her cabin. Not to disparage her little bed, of course, but this one is gigantic and fluffy and warm and... nice. Wow she's pretty drunk. Rum is not her beverage of choice. "Fine. But it'd better be worth it."

"You need to be asleep right now, okay? Because I'm doing my best to be the nice, endearing Mistress here, alright. It's hard. I don't do nice, girl, especially when I'm horny as fuck. And you're not making it any easier by requesting that I explain to you how to have sex with another woman."

"Sorry, Mistress." She murmurs, sitting up enough to pout. "In my defense, you are the one who got me drunk."

"I am aware that this is the direct result of my own stupidity. Do not rub it in." Mindfang glowers. It's kind of adorable. Rosa smiles, entranced, and reaches up towards her. Clearly caught off guard, Mindfang allows herself to be toppled face-first onto her mattress.

"Ow, fuck what are you doing-- fuck that hurts."

"Not sleeping alone." She says, with a crisp note of finality she's surprised to hear issuing from her own throat. Since when is she so imperious? Apparently this is what alcohol does to you. "Come to bed."
Mindfang shakes her head and glares. "No. I have work to get done."

"...No." Rosa says, pouting. Oh god is she really doing this? What is wrong with her? She can't boss her mistress around! Or maybe she can? Since, well, Mindfang seems to be smiling.

Mindfang drops her head back and huffs, loudly. "No, what, Pet?"

"No, Mistress. You're coming to bed."

"I'm not catering to the whims of the inebriated girl taking up residence in my bed." Mindfang says with a huff. But she bends over her and kisses her all the same. Rosa wraps her arms around her and tugs her close. "Who's in charge here, Pet?"

"...You, Mistress."

"Yes, Yes I am. So shut up and get your ass to sleep."

"Fine. Fine then." Rosa huffs, snuggling under the blankets. "But I'm still angry with you over your little... mind boggling stunt. That was rude and you'd better hope I don't inform your mother."

"You're drunk, Pet. Go to sleep." Mindfang wrinkles her nose. "And if I hear another word out of you I'll-- well-- I don't know, but it might very well involve a gag."

"Is that a sex thing?"

"WHAT DID I JUST SAY?" Mindfang draws her bed curtains shut, and suddenly Rosa's plunged into darkness. Warm, comfortable darkness that's punctuated first by Mindfang angrily banging around the cabin and then by the soft scratching of a quill on parchment when she settles down.

"...Good night, Mistress." She says, meekly, hiding her head under the pillow as if it can ward off any sort of retribution.

There's a loud huff. Mindfang slams her pen down onto her desk and Rosa hears her head thunk down, loudly. "GOOD NIGHT, Pet."

* * *

Rosa falls asleep to the cheery sounds of domesticity, unwilling to challenge Mindfang's authority any more than she needs to. Or. Well. Simply unwilling to challenge her patience. She's in charge--there's no doubt about that. Rosa's being indulged. She's being indulged until Mindfang gets bored with it and then who knows what's going to happen to her.

Still, it's more than a little comforting to wake up in the morning with Mindfang curled around her like she's a barnacle attached to a pier. Even if she smells like bourbon and keeps making little snuffling noises.

Rosa wants to check the clock, but, well, she's not entire sure if there's a clock in here. And it's rather hard to move when she has a pair of arms twined around her waist and a leg draped over her hips. What, does Mindfang think she's going to run off in the middle of the night?

Come to think of it, she probably does. Still, Rosa squirms a little bit, doing her best to see whether or not she can get out of Mindfang's embrace without an epic battle. No, no there's no luck there.

Mindfang sighs in her sleep and nuzzles closer and-- oh god, she's absolutely freezing. That's normal for someone in her blood range but-- well-- goodness that's off putting. Cold, cold, cold, okay used
Rosa's awake for a good half hour before Mindfang finally opens her eyes. She's grateful for small blessings because—well—she's ridiculously hungover and needed the recovery time. When Mindfang makes eye contact with Rosa, she groans and buries her face into her pillow.

"Ask me one more question about sex and I'll punch you in the boob." She hisses, threatening, and Rosa's skin crawls anxiously at the tone.

"...What?"
or, pirates make for good reading material

Chapter Summary

Mindfang and Rosa spend the morning together. And then the evening, reading. Or at least Mindfang's reading.

Chapter Notes

We're getting to the bits where my story should line up with canon, so just hang in for one more chapter of ADORABLE before the plot hits. Disclaimer: Plot chapters will still be broken up by adorablity.

"Oh, playing dumb are we?" Mindfang rolls over onto her back, stretching her arms above her and making noises like a dying cat. She yawns so widely Rosa could count her teeth and—oh—those fangs of hers really are remarkable.

"I think we were discussing how to use one's tongue, yes, but no one ever mentioned sex." She says softly, wondering if it's acceptable behavior to curl up against her side and go back to sleep. She stays where she is, propped up on her elbows casually observing her Mistress wake up.

"Okay, you're doing this on purpose still and it is not acceptable." Mindfang smacks her lightly on the ass, rolling her eyes. Rosa flinches back a little more harshly than the lighthearted blow warrants and that receives a groan and a mutter of:

"Relax, darling, I'd give you more warning than that if we were about to go at it."

"Um. Thank you?"

"Welcome, Pet." Mindfang kicks off the blankets and yawns so widely her jaw cracks. When she gets to her feet, Rosa's almost shocked into abject silence. Instead of the uniform black Rosa's seen her in every day so far, she's clad in a knee-length white nightgown with delicate lace straps. It's simple and flowing, made from cotton that's been worn soft. And it's... well... it's wholly unexpected. And incredibly endearing. She can see her shoulder blades jutting out like boulders in a river, covered in scars and a few bruises.

"What are you wearing?" Rosa mutters, pushing herself up and languidly stretching her neck.

"Shut up. It's comfy."

"It's darling, you look lovely." She says with a fond smile, running her fingers through her hair to get it out of her eyes. She momentarily forgets how short it's become and the perplexed stare she gives her own hand is enough to make Mindfang snort.

"Not the way I prefer to be described." Mindfang mutters and starts glancing around the room. "Where's my--"
"Robe?" Rosa pulls herself out from beneath the blankets and slips to the edge of the bed. Mindfang's robe is tangled around her and it takes a few seconds of fumbling, but she manages to slip it off quickly enough. Mindfang takes it from her with an affectionate pat to the crown of her head.

"Thanks, Pet."

"Happy to be of assistance, Mistress. Is there anything else I might do to make your morning more pleasant?"

"...Okay I can't tell if you're fucking around with me or if you're just being drunkenly helpful."

"Honestly? Both."

"Well put a fucking coat on and go get me my coffee." She grumbles, collapsing into an armchair as if she hasn't just spent the past several hours comfortably asleep.

"Um. I don't have a coat."

"Take my coat, put it on, go to the galley and punch the chef until he gets me my coffee."

"Can't I just make it myself and bring it to you?"

"Ugh, whatever." Mindfang grumbles, pulling her robe around her and fastening it loosely. Oh lord she'd look absolutely adorable with her hair braided back and tied off. Maybe with a little orange bow, to break up the blue a little bit? She'd look lovely in orange. Orange and yellow. With just a hint of blue. Contrasting colors never hurt anyone, after all.

"Get some clothes on and do whatever you want." She mutters, rubbing angrily at her face and shuffling over to the bath. She turns the faucets slowly and, unlike Rosa, bends to test the water on her wrist.

Well. Apparently Mindfang doesn't like her anymore. Or perhaps she's simply not much of a morning person? Still, there's a rather vast issue with her current orders:

"Mistress, I have nothing to wear."

"What? Oh. Fuck. Fuck I forgot. Um." She yawns again, and peers around the privacy screen at her. "Uh. Is there anything in my closet?"

"I-- I wouldn't know, Mistress."

"Well, have a look and take whatever." She mutters and then there's a lot of splashing. Is it acceptable behavior to wear one's Mistress's clothing? It's one thing to accept fancy lingerie-- that's more of a benefit to one's companion that one's self, she supposes. But taking clothing? It is with permission, after all. That thought doesn't put her any more at ease. She can't shake the feeling that allowing Mindfang to indulge her so much is going to end badly for her.

Rosa half wonders if she's expected to go over and assist Mindfang in the bath but she doesn't really want to so she slips out of bed instead. It takes only a few minutes to get the sheets straightened and the duvet tucked under the mattress once more. It takes longer than anticipated for her to get the pillows arranged in a pleasing fashion, but by the time she ties the curtains back, she's reasonably assured that no one can complain about her bed-making skills.

When she pulls open Mindfang's armoire, she's confronted by a much bigger problem than throw
pillows. The woman has a lot of clothes. A lot of them. So many of them Rosa's not sure when she's found a chance to wear half of them.

After some searching she manages to find something simple that looks like it should fit, black and made out of a simple cotton. Rosa exchanges it for the chemise she's wearing, hanging it in the closet with more solemnity than the occasion merits. She pulls her fingers through her hair in an effort to smooth it and, with shaking hands, picks up Mindfang's coat from the floor where she left it and draws it up over her shoulders.

Oh goodness is it warm. Almost instantly she feels like she's back in bed huddled up under a mountain of quilts. The bloody thing might look impractical and ridiculous, but in actuality, it does seem to serve some purpose.

She shuffles over to the door unsure of her every movement, not wanting to release herself from the room but not entirely comfortable with the idea of provoking Mindfang when she's clearly not in the mood to play nice.

"...Mistress, I'm going to go see about your breakfast," She calls out, voice quavering a little bit. Mindfang makes a noise of approval and then stops her with a quick sigh of:

"Thank you."

"Of course, Mistress." She bows before slipping out of the room, a useless gesture since Mindfang can't see her and more than likely wouldn't appreciate it. When Rosa starts off across the deck, she's grateful for the cover of her Mistress's coat. She has no idea what port they're bound for, but wherever on the ocean they are, it's a great deal colder than where they started off. She hadn't noticed their progress while she was hidden away in her little room, unable to discern much more than the faint shifts in the color of the water as the ship bobs along.

She finds herself wishing she was wearing shoes, as the deck is covered in frost and months spent kneeling with your arms shackled above your head hardly helps preserve the callouses on your feet.

There's a few deckhands scattered about, one at the wheel and a few scuttling about doing lord knows what. She really should find out what exactly goes into the maintenance of a ship like this-- it can only be beneficial, after all. Like, for example, where in fresh hell the kitchen is. She knows where the dining room is but she's relatively sure that going down there won't result in anything good.

Thankfully, the same man is standing tall behind the ship's wheel. Rosa takes the steps up to the bridge once more, forcing herself not to be nervous.

"Morning, M'am." He says with a tip of his hat. He's looking her over with undisguised amusement and Rosa half wants to slap him before he says: "Captain lent you her coat, did she?"

"Oh-- Oh, um. Yes. She wanted me to bring her breakfast and I don't exactly have much in the way of... weather appropriate clothing."

"Hmph. You got her out of bed this early?"

"I-- Well-- I don't quite know what time it is, but she woke up on her own and she's in the bath--"

"If you can get that woman to eat a decent breakfast before she gets on deck every morning, I will devote myself to you wholeheartedly." He says without humor. "I love the woman, but she's an absolute bitch in the mornings. D'you know how many men you lose when they're too afraid to volunteer for the morning watch? A lot. We keep having to fire sailors because they won't go near
the Captain until after 11."

"Oh dear. That won't do at all. I'll see what I can do."

"Mmm, she'll listen to you if you ask. More than a bit sweet on you, I think."

"What gave it away?" Rosa asks, wryly, raising an eyebrow.

"Just an observation, Ma'am. No need to get upset." He says with a chuckle, then point across the deck. "Galley's through there. We've got an actual chef in there, not one of the men. A certain someone happens to be picky about her food."

"Why am I not surprised?" Rosa mutters, slipping her hands into the pockets of her borrowed coat. Her hands encounter a surprising amount of clutter, nothing that she can identify without pulling it out. "Um-- thank you, Marcus, was it?"

"Yes ma'am. And might I say that you look particularly lovely this morning?"

She flushes and he laughs.

"Pass my regards to her highness." He says, smiling and saluting her.

"Of course."

* * *

When Rosa slips through the door to the galley, she's not sure what to expect. Surely you can't have a traditional sort of kitchen aboard a ship, especially when you're attempting to feed a crew of... well... a lot. But the galley looks just as maneuverable as her kitchen back at home, or, well, what her old kitchen looked like. There's a tired looking man sitting at a small table, his face etched with shadows as he peruses the script of a letter.

"Pardon me," Rosa says, softly, letting the door swing shut behind her. "But the Captain sent me to fetch her breakfast."

He glances up from his reading with a skeptical gaze and bares his teeth. "Who the hell are you, then?"


"Well no shit. But-- she's never awake this early."

"It would appear my company is suitable incentive." She says, arching her eyebrows. Oh god what is she implying? Nothing that reflects well on her morals, that's for sure. "Either way she's awake and wants her coffee."

"Haven't made any."

"Well. Shall I do it for you, then?"

"Not assing myself to do a job that no one told me to do." He snorts, goes back to reading. "Not my problem if you fuck things up."

Rude. That's not very nice at all. Rosa frowns, but steps further into the kitchen. It doesn't take her very long to find the tea kettle and while the water boils she starts to rummage about in the cabinets.
Presumably this kitchen is devoted to the sailors working above deck because, to be quite frank, there's not much room in here nor are there many supplies. But she unearths a loaf of bread eventually, finds a knife next and cuts off several pieces. The cook is watching her with wary eyes, glancing away every time she turns to look at him.

Not a very nice man whatsoever, she decides as the water begins to boil. Now, how do you use this again? She frowns at the French press she discovered hiding in the back of a cupboard.

"...You can't be serious. What do you think this is, a hotel?"

"No." She says, with a sweet smile. "I think it's a pirate ship. And I think the owner of said pirate this is a rather exacting employer and I know better than to attempt to serve her a subpar breakfast."

"And what do you think you know after--"

"Let's be frank, Sir," Rosa says with a snap, leveling ground coffee into the press with a sharp movement of her wrist. "I claim to know nothing other than how to keep your Captain happy. And I'd imagine that her being in a good mood makes everyone's lives just slightly easier. So perhaps you can find it in the depths of your heart to either shut up or be helpful."

Okay. Admittedly, she isn't a morning person herself. But she's more than willing to be tolerant... provided her company is trying as well.

He doesn't say anything more as she brews the coffee, except to gruffly inform her that the Captain has a tea set in her room and she doesn't need to worry about a cup. She takes him at his word, arranging a tray as quickly as she can.

By the time she makes it back to Mindfang's cabin, she's out of the bath. Laying...

Laying...

Laying absolutely naked on her bed, apparently fast asleep. She has the sheet haphazardly twined around her, but not much of her is covered and her skin is still gleaming with water. Rosa's torn between dropping the breakfast tray to cover her face or staring.

Mindfang is not, however, asleep. When Rosa closes the door she opens her eyes and lifts up her head.

"Took you long enough." She says, gruffly, and a little out of breath.

Rosa keeps her eyes carefully trained on Mindfang's horns, praying to all the higher powers she's not going to have to ask her to get dressed. Perhaps she'll do it herself without prompting?

"Your cook and I do not see eye to eye on the proper preparation of coffee. We had to debate the issue."

"Motherfucker." Mindfang grouses, sitting up. Her hair is tangled like yarn that's been left to the whims of a cat, curls still dripping on to the floor and frizzing out at sixteen different angles. "I'll have a word with him."

"I think I already did." Rosa places the breakfast tray on the coffee table, scouting around the room for a cup. Oh, yes, over there in the bar. She opens one of the cabinets and retrieves a coffee cup that's far too dainty for where it's taken up residence, made from a beautiful porcelain that rings out when she places it onto it's saucer, gilded filigree designs painted on it's side.
She does her best not to look at Mindfang because-- well-- she's still very nude. And doesn't seem to care whatsoever. Or notice, really.

"Hmmm..." Mindfang does not sound convinced. She sound absolutely skeptical. But When Rosa slips over to her and wordlessly hands her the coffee cup she brightens immediately.

"...Should I find your robe, Mistress?" She asks, finally, staring pointedly at the ceiling. Mindfang, placidly sipping her coffee, shrugs.

"Sure, if you want. Although I'd think you'd be warm enough in my coat--"

"YOU'RE NAKED." She chokes out, a little more loudly than she means to. "AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO REACT SO CAN YOU PLEASE SHOW SOME MODESTY AND COVER UP."

Mindfang wordlessly pulls her sheet up around her and nods, eyes wide.

"...My apologies, Mistress."

"Yeah. Um. Yeah. It's okay... Just, uh, maybe you can chill out a little?" Mindfang hands her the coffee cup and shuffles across the room to where her robe has been abandoned on the floor, sheet grasped to her chest. She doesn't take her eyes off of her, looking more than a little nervous. When she pulls her robe on, she ties it tightly around her waist and raises her hands, slowly.

"Better, Pet?"

"Yes, Mistress. Thank you."

"You going to freak out again?"

"No, Mistress, I don't think so."

"I think, uh, maybe we should just sit down and eat breakfast... and you can, um, maybe relax a little?" Mindfang doesn't seem entirely willing to meet her eyes. Color is still lingering in her neck and Rosa realizes, belatedly, that perhaps screaming for her to put her clothes on implied something stronger than her inborn need for modesty.

Oh dear. How do you apologize for inadvertently making someone self-conscious when you don't even want to acknowledge the situation.

"That's not necessary, Mistress, I think I have more than adequately regained my composure." She says, softly, folding her hands before her and bowing her head.

Mindfang walks back over to her, tangled hair leaving drips all over the floor. She guides her over to the couch and shoves her down without a word, retrieving a second coffee cup and filling it. She trades it for her own and then settles in at the couch, knees tucked up to her chest.

The awkwardness in the silence is palpable. Rosa sips her coffee quietly, unsure of how the caffeine will affect her already frazzled nerves but unwilling to reject the peace offering.

"So, um, just out of curiosity... What do you mean by not knowing how to react to a naked woman?" Mindfang asks, cautiously. "Is-- it-- well--"

She's clearly unwilling to say what she's thinking. Rosa can feel her face burning and she stares down at her cup.
"Well, um, do I look or do I not look? What's the etiquette in a situation like this? I mean--" She catches her breath and slumps over slightly. "In a situation like mine."

"Um." Rosa steals a glance at her Mistress and she looks oddly relieved, sitting up a little taller. "Are you asking whether or not you're allowed to look at me?"

"Not in as many words, but, um, yes Mistress. I am."

"Yes. Yes you can look at me. Do a hell of a lot more than that," She mutters into her coffee, coloring a little around her temples. "So, um, it's not... it's not me then?"

"Oh, good lord no." Rosa says with a laugh, coloring brightly. "I-- Um... I--"

"Pardon me, Pet?" Mindfang asks, quietly, her face just as bright colored as Rosa's.

"You're quite an attractive woman." Rosa says, slowly, not sure if it's the right thing to say but unwilling to let Mindfang assume for even a single second that she's anything less than perfection. "I- um. I hope that's not out of line."

"Oh, no, yeah. Unacceptable." Mindfang grumbles, leaning over to kiss her cheeks. It's not a sexually charged gesture like almost everything seems to be with them. It's a gesture of pure affection, her lips warm against her face. "I can't have you thinking I'm attractive. I mean. How despicable."

"I--"

"Don't fret so, Pet," Mindfang mutters, resting her head on her shoulder. "I like having you around."

Rosa feels her face color even more deeply. The urge to curl her arms around Mindfang and huddle into her embrace is impossible to deny.

"C'mon," Mindfang says, nuzzling her before pulling away regretfully. "I have a ship to run."

* * *

They eat breakfast cordially, the knowledge of the mornings awkwardness hanging in the air like a crystal chandelier. There's easily a hundred things Rosa wants to ask her, tease her about, laugh about.

Instead she helps her dress, her fingers lacing up Mindfang's corset with a speed that surprises her. Rosa has her dressed in the space of a few minutes, wrapped up warm and tight. She doesn't know much about the upper bloods beyond their basic developmental and biological structures, but she knows enough to surmise that the cold weather cannot be good for her Mistress, especially as lean as she is. So she does her best to bundle her up, helping her into a dress that's thick and long sleeved beneath her coat. Mindfang submits to her fretting without an impressive amount of whining and pouting but doesn't snap, remarkably.

The only thing she can't win about is her hair. She attempts to reason her way into convincing Mindfang to sit down with a hairbrush but to no avail.

Mindfang frowns and dismisses her to her cabin without another word when the subject is broached. Rosa glares in the doorway until her Mistress shoves her hat on, huffs, and shoves her onto the deck.

"Off with you," She grumbles, frowning and shoving Rosa towards her cabin. "I'll call for you when I get the time."
Rosa retreats to her cabin doing her best not to sulk. Mindfang's moods are impossible to predict and being dismissed so abruptly is not her favorite feeling in the world. It is, in fact, more than a little soul crushing. There's nothing that can remind you of your relative worth in the social hierarchy quite like having the person who bought you ordering you from their presence.

She sits on her bed lounging in the sun for the better part of the day, startled out of her reverie when Marcus shoves her door open and gives her a curt smile.

"Captain wants you." He says, stifling a yawn.

"Oh. Thank you." She says with a smile, climbing to her feet almost immediately. While she feels a little put out by this morning’s dismissal, it’s hardly anything an evening spent cosseting her Mistress can’t repair.

She stands in the center of Mindfang’s room as calmly as she can, hands folded demurely before her and shoulders pushed back. There's a great deal of her that's more than adequately positive that she looks less than attractive after a day spent tossing and turning in her bed. In fact, she probably looks on the other side of nightmarish, her hair unbrushed for the day, smoothed only with the aid of a hazy reflection in a porthole. The rings around her eyes, however, must have vanished; she hasn't slept this much since she was still in her pre-adolescent sweeps. It feels good to be well-rested and the sharpness of synapses firing like bolts from a crossbow is just as refreshing as a cup of good, strong earl gray.

Mindfang's seated at her desk, a pair of glasses perched on the rim of her nose, quill pen woven in her fingers. She wields the pen with all the dexterity of a fencer at her drills, at ease with her weapon of choice and almost flaunting her dexterity as she continues to write with only sparse glances at her ledger. Her fingertips are stained a brilliant cobalt, bright as her blood. Rosa's eyes are drawn to it, the splotches like bloodstains across her otherwise unmarred skin and the soft glitter of sapphires in her signet ring only complimented by the chemical additions.

She has beautiful hands, Rosa notices belatedly. Her fingers are long without being unusually so, and the structure of her bones leading up to her wrist is so feminine and perfect that she immediately feels like scolding her mistress for debasing them so much as to service a ship. They're remarkably well-tended to, without callouses or broken nails-- if she had only had her mistress's acquaintance by the means of her hands alone, she would have taken her for an ennobled aristocratic scholar almost immediately.

"Rosa, pet," she says, the scritching of her quill hesitating almost imperceptivity as she goes to re-ink her pen. She casts Rosa an affectionate smile, but doesn't seem to see her beyond that. Her mind is clearly fathoms away, sinking like an anchor into the depths of her thoughts.

Rosa wonders what she's writing so furiously, with her fang digging into her lip in a queerly endearing manner, eyebrows furrowed just slightly with concentration. A letter, perhaps? But she doesn't seem like the type anyone would wish to share written correspondence with. In fact, Rosa's adequately sure that she's not the kind of woman who writes a letter unless she can help it. What would they say, anyways? 'Bought a woman today. Lots of water. Lots of sailing. Slight storm. Got drunk. Fell asleep. Steered the ship. Fell asleep again.'

That's not fair, Rosa scolds herself, there's far more to this business of captaining a ship than you know about. So what if things seem a little boring to you? You're not doing anything! You'd be just
as bored if you were sitting in the slave market, and far, far less comfortable.

She smooths her hands over the front of her dress and takes a deep, cleaning breath. Not for the first time she wishes she was wearing something more attractive-- it would make being in the same room as the captain far easier if she felt a little more confident and, shockingly, the fact that Mindfang's dress is two sizes two large isn't exactly helping her figure. "Might I be of assistance, Mistress?"

"Hmm? Oh!" Mindfang glances up at her, startled as if she's magically appeared in the center of her boudoir. "Nothing in particular, pet, I just wanted a bit of company."

"Oh. I see." Was this normal behavior? Surely she should be cleaning something or... well... whatever it is you did on a ship to keep order. "I'm happy to oblige, mistress...?"

"You don't need to make it sound like such a chore, darling." She says with a laugh, finally setting down her quill and giving her thirty seconds of undivided attention. "If you want to leave, by all means--"

"No, I didn't intend any disrespect at all Mistress, I was simply asking what I could help with--" Her eyes go wide and she feels her hands start to shake. "I simply wanted to know--"

"Darling, darling!" She says with a soft chuckle, turning in her chair to face Rosa, eyes wide. "Don't fret so! I'm not suggesting anything untoward on your behalf!"

Rosa falls silent with a bright flush.

"You're so precious." Mindfang says, pushing her chair back from the desk and crossing her legs. She gestures for Rosa to come forward and she does so, crossing the carpet in small, measured steps. When she's close enough that Mindfang's forced to tilt her head back to make eye contact a pair of arms wrap around her waist and tug, gently.

Rosa sinks into Mindfang's lap without having to be asked twice. She knows she shouldn't be so at ease, really but it's hard to resist. It feels good to be warm against someone else and Mindfang's touch, so far, has yet to stop being exhilarating.

She wants to be able to smile down at her and reach forward to brush back the few curls that have fallen across her temple and then she wants to bend her head back to make eye contact a pair of arms wrap around her waist and tug, gently.

"I hope you're thinking about me when you look like that." Mindfang purrs, shaking her out of her reverie. "Because you look absolutely blissful."

Rosa gives her a small smile and then reaches up to brush her hair back behind her ear. Her hand starts to tremble halfway through the gesture, though and she lets it fall limply back at her side. "Do you want me to be?"

"...I don't know if you realize this, but you really are the most darling creature on the face of this ocean. Look at you trying to be all flirtatious."

With a small squeak, Rosa tries to get to her feet. That's not what she'd meant to do at all and-- Mindfang won't let her up.

"Relax, I'm not going to eat you." Mindfang huffs, leaning in close an snapping her teeth close to her neck. "I might bite, but I never go for the jugular. I'm just a little chilly, Pet, and you're nice and
"That's not as comforting as you think it is, Mistress."

"Mmmm. Okay. Have it your way, love." Mindfang says with a laugh, turning her chair to face her desk once more, wrapping her non-dominant arm around Rosa's waist and picking up her pen.

Rosa waits five minutes before speaking up. "If you were cold, Mistress, I could have simply found you a blanket."

"Oh? Hmm? Oh, no, not nearly as exciting." Mindfang says, her voice distant once more. "You're far more pliant than a blanket."

Rosa goes stiff and digs her fingers into the arm of the chair. What did she just say? What? Pliant? Oh god she is pliant, isn't she. Like a... like a... like a little floppy rag doll. "I'm sorry, what?"

"Nothing." Mindfang says and it's clear from the foggy tone of her voice she's not following the thread of their conversation any more. "You're pliant. You're-- nice and lissome. A lot more comforting than a worn out old blanket."

Oh. Oh she meant physically pliant, not mentally pliant. "So-- um--"

"Personality wise, you're anything but." Mindfang snorts with a roll of her gorgeous blue eyes.

"My apologies, Mistress." She murmurs, absenting reaching up to smooth out the lapel of Mindfang’s coat. She pauses in her scribbling to give Rosa a warm smile and say, quietly, 'it wasn't a complaint, darling'.

She doesn't need to hear it because even after only a few days she's beginning to understand that Mindfang isn't looking for someone to say 'yes Mistress' and kneel at her feet. She's looking for someone to say 'yes Mistress' and then ask what she can do next. Or rather, call her out on her bullshit.

She's not looking for a pliant wretch. She's looking for a salvageable wreck. And that's odd--incredibly odd- in and of itself. Why would you spend so much on someone that you're not going to make use of? But she supposes Mindfang's getting her use out of her in her own way and, well, that's enough.

Rosa takes her smile as a sign that she's welcome to touch her and, as the minutes tick passed, marked out by the grandfather clock against the far wall (there IS a clock in here!) she hesitantly raises a hand and runs it through her hair. Mindfang moves her head towards her touch and lets out a quiet sigh of what Rosa interprets to be pleasure. She continues to stroke her like a cat for a good ten minutes before turning her gaze to the pages spread on the desk before her.

It's some sort of gorgeous leather bound tome-- black leather backing with pages trimmed in a blue metallic paint. Mindfang's using a gorgeous ebony pen dipped in blue ink and she's covering pages and pages of cream colored paper in her flowing script. Rosa starts to read it and it's difficult, but she manages. As she makes sense some of the words it becomes quickly apparent that this is, in fact, Mindfang's journal.

There's a quick record of where they are, what the conditions are like, who's been on watch. And then things dissolve into much more personal recollections. Rosa reads both pages that are opened before them and without noticing her hand falls from Mindfang's head to her shoulder.

She reads up to where Mindfang's still writing and then the pen skips a bit of space and she scratches
'That felt nice why did you stop' and Rosa jolts, her hand flying automatically to her Mistress's head once more. She makes a beeline for one of her horns because, well, as intimate of a gesture as that is she's got the feeling that Mindfang isn't about to complain. When Rosa's fingers make contact with her horn base she lets out a guttural moan and her head moves immediately towards Rosa's hands.

Then her pen scratches out a quick 'thank you dear' and before Rosa can laugh she crosses out both phrases and goes back to journaling.

"I'm sitting in your lap," She whispers in her ear, digging in her nails just enough to elicit a pleased reaction from Mindfang. Yes, assumption was correct, she does not mind if anyone's a little rough with her. Wow did not see that coming, the less mature voice in her head snarks and she shakes it off. "You can speak to me, you know."

Mindfang nuzzles into her and whispers back: "I just wanted to see if you were paying attention."

Rosa laughs and shifts slightly in her lap to get more comfortable. "You're a good writer. I'm surprised."

"...I'm choosing to take that as a compliment because I do understand where you'd get the idea that I'm an illiterate moron so I can't really fault you for being surprised." Mindfang says, wryly, pausing to turn the page of her journal and re-ink her pen. "I do more than just terrorize and plunder, my dear."

"I think you're being lazy." Rosa murmurs in response, raising her eyebrows and tracing her fingers up the arch of Mindfang's horn. It's the one that has a bit of a hook to it and Rosa traces the sculptural feel of it with slightly wondering eyes. She has a hooked horn of her own, so it's not the complete novelty it would possibly be to someone else, but she's never seen this sort of design before. Rosa skirts her fingers across the dip of the crescent shape, shivering a little at the feel of the horn's ridges dancing beneath her fingertips. "I think you should talk to me if you want something."

"Making demands now, are we?" Mindfang murmurs, dropping her head back and letting out a pleased moan. "I guess someone feels a little empowered."

"Only to make your life a little easier." Rosa says, withdrawing her hand before her caressing becomes a little too intense for her Mistress's liking. Or, well, becomes awkward for her. "I've been known to get quite passive aggressive."

"Try that with me and I will pull you over my lap and turn that lovely ass of yours bright green."

"Mmmmph." There isn't a response for that. So she doesn't give one. Although, she could comment about the fact that it's a better alternative than being whipped? But Mindfang would have a response for that as well, most likely. After a few minute's pause, during which Mindfang stares her down with a wicked smirk, Rosa sighs and says:

"Fine. I'll agree to accept written orders."

"You're making this feel like your victory and it's taking the fun out of this for me." Mindfang grumbles, kissing her cheek and straightening up. "Fine. I'll accept your acceptance."

She goes back to writing and Rosa goes back to lazily playing with her hair. The process of reading, pausing to grumble and pacifying her goes on for about another half hour before Mindfang drops her pen, smiles and shuts her journal.
"Thank you for keeping me company."

"Keeping you company while you write and refuse to carry on a coherent conversation?" Rosa says with what she hopes come across as an affectionate smile. Mindfang shows her teeth in a playful snarl and to Rosa's shock, leans in and kisses her. Their teeth clink together and that hurts a little bit but Mindfang's giggling at herself and so Rosa doesn't pull away.

She lets her continue the kiss, lets her wrap her hands around her waist and hold her tightly. Mindfang does stop laughing and the teeth stop being an issue and-- well-- Rosa slips her hands around her neck because that feels like the right thing to do and then--

Mindfang pulls back just enough to make eye contact and says, quietly: "I know I'm ridiculous. And you're so sweet. Thank you."

She reaches up with one of her pale, cold hands and soothes the hair back from her forehead. For a few moments Rosa can't do anything but completely forgets what it means to breathe properly. She looks warm and sincere-- not for the first time, but she's never looked like this when they were so close-- and Rosa wants nothing more than to let herself think that there's affection there.

She feels almost as if she'd been punched in the stomach as her words sink in because-- because she can't remember the last time anyone's thanked her. For anything. Anything at all.

"You don't have anything to thank me for." She says, her words catching in her throat as she echoes Mindfang's words from the night before. This is the right thing to say-- or at least it seems like it is because her face goes bright for a few moments. "It's my pleasure."

Mindfang leans in and kisses her once more, but this time it's short and sweet and their lips barely touch. "All the same, my dear. You have my thanks."

Rosa drops her head to Mindfang's shoulder to hide her blush. Mindfang chuckles and urges her off of her lap. Rosa stands, still clinging to her. She realizes what she's doing and quickly drops her hands. She clenches them tightly behind her, eyes wide and heart beating.

Mindfang pats her on the head-- she glares, but that seems to be okay-- and picks up her journal. She turns to the wall behind her desk and slides back one of the frosted glass panes to reveal... an entire bookshelf full of similar books.

Her eyes go wide and she finds herself clinging to the desk. "Are those... are those all yours?"

"Hmm? Oh yes, yes they are." She slips her journal into the space left at the end and closes the cabinet. She gestures to the wall and says, with the air of a woman who's about to say something she knows is impressive: "This whole wall is my writing. I've got more back at home."

"That's. That's." Despite the cockiness in her voice, Rosa can't hide her reaction. "That's phenomenal."

"Thank you."

"I mean-- I mean really, the things you must have seen-- the places you've been--" She finds herself drifting over to the cabinets with an almost magnetic intensity, pressing her palms to the glass with her jaw slightly slack. "That's just-- it's-- incredible."

"Oh. I mean. I guess." Mindfang shrugs and slips her hands into the pockets of her coat. Rosa steals a glance over at her and she's starting to turn a little blue around her neck. She's... she's blushing. Oh dear lord that's utterly endearing. "It's just, you know. My journals. They're not really all that
"I've never been anywhere before." Rosa murmurs, staring at the shadows of books she can see behind the protective glass plating as if somehow the information can be transmitted to her brain. "This is-- this is the first time I've ever been anywhere exciting."

Unless you count the fact that she'd spent years in the desert running from the authorities, she'd never even left the caverns. And she hardly counts being held as a slave below decks on a trader's ship, or being kept in the slave quarters behind doors.

For the record, she does not enjoy thinking about any of these things, nor is she willing to compare those experiences to the ones she's having now.

"I've-- I've never done anything exciting. I've never had any adventures before." She feels Mindfang's breath at her neck before her arms wrap around her waist. She chuckles and the sound shakes up through her ribcage into her sternum. Rosa feels it through the flimsy fabric of her borrowed dress and the sound is odd to her ears, but still welcome.

"Well, I think we're working on changing that." She says, pressing her lips to her throat. "We'll make you into a swashbuckling pirate wench yet."

"That sounds lovely." She says reaching a hand behind her and tangling her fingers in her hair once more. Mindfang purrs and squeezes Rosa's waist tightly. "That sounds... absolutely lovely."

"And until we find some suitably exciting way to make you feel like the stuff of legends--" Rosa's reasonably sure she's already part of several legends-- not the kind she ever wanted to be a part of but Mindfang doesn't need to hear about that, really-- "You are more than welcome to read whatever you wish."

"Really?" She says, her voice a little more hoarse and excited than she'd like it to be. "You don't mind?"

"Not at all. Why in the world would I write anything down that I didn't want anyone to read?" She nuzzles in close once more and Rosa turns her head enough to beam. Mindfang catches sight of her and laughs. "Darling, it's not quite that exciting. I don't do very much most of the time."

"I know." She says, arching up on her toes then falling flat on her feet once more. "But now I have something to do."

"Ohhhhhhh, and there goes my ego."

"Something fun to do." Rosa amends, still smiling. "And I'm sure they'll all be absolutely fantastic."

"Better. Much better, Pet." Mindfang says with a snort. She kisses her on the temple and then steps back, clapping her hands to Rosa's side in a way that makes her jolt and let out a squeak. "Now, how about we see about getting you a glass of wine and some supper?"

"If you're trying to seduce me you're going about it correctly." She says, wryly, and a little sharper than she intends to. Mindfang turns and gives her a questioning stare and, for once, she refuses to quaver. But instead of the anticipated snarl of reprobation Mindfang simply laughs and throws an arm around her waist.

"And perhaps you should stay here tonight." She murmurs, her breath curling down Rosa's neck. "And keep me company while I write."
"Of course, Mistress," Rosa says, softly, arching her head back and Mindfang nuzzles into her neck, her lips moving up and down her tendons. "If you wouldn't feel self-conscious?"

"Rosa, sweetheart," She says, softly with a wicked smirk. "You've seen me naked. If that doesn't make me self-conscious, not much else is going to."

It's only when she's half asleep in Mindfang's later that night, with half a bottle of wine and eighty pages of Mindfang's oldest journal polished off that she realizes, with a soft trill, that Mindfang had said her name.
or, seriously Rosa you've seen her naked you're allowed to talk about feelings

Chapter Summary

Mindfang is sulking. Rosa tries to make it better. She ends up crying. Pretty much par for the course.

Trigger Warnings: Feelings jam.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long. I'm back at college and incredibly busy with a few things, including planning for one of my school's traditions and working on stuff for the club I'm in. Hopefully the next chapter should get up sooner? Thanks for sticking with me my dears.

They fall into a routine after that night. Rosa wakes up, slips out of bed and retrieves her Mistress's breakfast. She brings it to her cabin and wakes her up-- if she's not up already awake-- and they eat together, curled up on the couch before the fireplace. Mindfang will leave to take the morning's watch and Rosa will be left in her cabin to read. She reads quite a bit, journals and guidebooks and whatever else she can get her hands on. She usually spends most of the day alone, curled up on Mindfang's couch. Her Mistress, however, will occasionally stop in at midday with afternoon tea and they'll banter back and forth before she gets called away for one reason or another.

It's a vast improvement on being cooped up in her little cabin. A vast improvement. She feels freer, even though she rarely leaves her Mistress's room. But she has the option-- at least she thinks she does. After all she wanders freely between the kitchen, and Mindfang has yet to complain when she lingers at the bridge at dawn to say hello to Marcus.

Mindfang's moods are the hardest thing to predict. She's not always cheerful, and she certainly isn't always patient. During the course of a few evenings she simply sits at her desk scowling, scribbling in her journal with such ferocity the paper tears beneath her hand. On those nights Rosa sits in the furthest corner of the couch huddled up on herself not making a sound until Mindfang lets out a loud huff and mutters:

"God I hate my life," which she takes as a cue to unfold herself and ask, quietly: "Can I be of assistance?" and climb into her lap.

That usually works to make her grumbling stop, although the scowling doesn't always go away. But Rosa's beginning to learn that, yes, her bark is worse that her bite and just because she seems rather... temperamental, doesn't mean she's planning on acting on it.

At least, that's what she hopes. So far when Mindfang starts growling at her she simple raises her eyebrows and asks:

"Is this my cue to find something alcoholic and make you drink until you shut up?" She usually asks,
fidgeting with her hair until Mindfang rolls her eyes and tells her to go find a bottle of wine.

Things are... comfortable. It's strange to say, but they are. She's got a warm bed, good food and while they don't fit very well, clean clothes.

It's a better life than she's had in a good twenty five years, and she's not about to complain. Except, well...

She's still bored.

She's sure there's a lot going on aboard the ship-- it is a pirate ship, after all, and on more than one occasion she's been told to go hide under the bed and stay there, but, well, you can't see much of the action while you're hiding under a hidden panel in a captain's bed. The only explanation Mindfang offers is:

"There's a lot of dead bastards and lot of angry bastards and if anything happens I want you safe until I can fix it," because, apparently, there isn't any chance of Mindfang failing at a raid.

Mindfang rarely sleeps beside her, usually crawling into bed at the oddest hours of the night or day. Rosa can't remember being able to stay awake until she blows out the lantern and calls it a night, although she does recollect several occasions of being shoved to the far side of the bed and having a troll koala bear wrap herself around her. But more often than not she's opened her eyes to Mindfang sleeping in her armchair at an awkward angle or sprawled out on her carpet.

The urge to inform her that This Is Not How Things Work is only countered by her overwhelming adoration for Mindfang's bed, silk sheets and down comforter and soft woolen blankets. She's spent more time sleeping in Mindfang's bed than she cares to admit, mostly because she really should insist on sleeping on the floor instead of Mindfang, or at least retreat back to her quarters at the end of a long night. But Mindfang is persuasive and the murmur of her voice against the back of her neck, low and arousing, "perhaps you should spend the night, Pet," is always the perfect inducement to drift off the dreamland.

So when she wakes up hours before dawn to the sound of Mindfang scuttling out of the room, without ever having felt her beside her, she's hardly surprised. The urge to roll over and go back to sleep is a siren's call that she obeys. When her eyes open once more, it's just before dawn.

She slips out of bed with a yawn, wondering if Mindfang will be back for breakfast. The clock on the mantle says it's just after three AM and she's already hungry. Her choice is made by her overwhelming craving for coffee. In the days since her unfortunate encounter with the Cook, the coffee press has been moved to Mindfang's room and she brews herself a cup with mechanical motions.

Is this normal? She thinks to herself for the millionth time. This can't be normal. Who the hell has heard of a slave allowed such permissions? Not her, not from a single slave on the market. Not that they talked very much, mind you.

She finishes her coffee with a contented hum. And then after five minutes decides that the boredom is intolerable. The need to do something, anything, even the most menial of tasks comes on suddenly and she's making a fresh pot of coffee in seconds.

Mindfang can't possibly be upset about someone bringing her breakfast. Or, if she is, her anger will be tempered by the fact that she'll have food and will, therefore, be too busy eating to commit homicide.
Before slipping out of the cabin door she wraps herself up in a worn-out gray wool blanket she'd found in Mindfang's linen chest, using it as a makeshift shawl. It's a blanket she's decided is 'hers', because Mindfang had taken one look at it and muttered 'oh god that thing? Burn it' and that's as good as an invitation, isn't it?

She pulls it around her as tightly as possible to ward off the chill, glad that it covers her legs. Mindfang had managed to unearth a pair of boots that fit her well enough, and a pair of socks that are scratchy, yet warm, but to date there's no hope of making a pair of pants fit her. Taking the teapot in one hand and the coffee mug in the other, she slips out of the cabin door. It's before sunrise, a state she's familiar with by now, and the sky's still a strange shade of bluish gray with the moonlight off the water and the stars glittering in the sky.

Mindfang's at the wheel, of course, and it only takes a minute or two to reach her. She notices Rosa coming up the stairs with a quirk of her lip and a salute.

"Morning Captain." Rosa says, softly, placing the kettle and mug onto the low table that seems to live its life empty and abandoned on the bridge. Mindfang waves her over impatiently, taking a hand off the wheel to pull her in for a quick embrace. Rosa lets her Mistress hold her closely for a few moments before pulling away.

"Breakfast?"

She asks with a nervous smile.

"Later." Mindfang replies with a heavy sigh, giving her a baleful glare. "Thank you for offering, though."

"I brought you coffee." She mutters quietly, fidgeting with the hem of her blanket. "You were gone before I could wake up."

"The intention was that you'd sleep in for once, Pet, instead of getting out of bed and trying to spoil me." She snarls back, more than a little grumpily, reaching up to rub at her eyes before taking hold of the wheel once more. "You need your sleep, darling."

"I get enough sleep." Rosa says, dryly, taking a seat on the edge of the table and staring out over the ocean. She can see waves breaking over the ship's bow, arching up against the walls in explosions of water and flotsam. There's no sound other than the crashing of the water and the creaking of wood and, for once, the world seems almost peaceful.

The ocean is beautiful, Rosa muses, beautiful and vast and absolutely terrifying. She's glad for the solidity of oak beneath her feet, the warmth of an elegant captain at her back and the safety of a pirate crew around her. There are things in the depths of the sea she can barely begin to fathom, creatures she knows nothing about and creatures she wishes she could forget were there.

But, for now, the ocean is a place of beauty. The waves are gleaming with stardust and the color of the sea is enchanting, a blue so black she wouldn't say it was a color without the brightness of the moon. She could watch the ocean all day, staring out at the open expanse of the sea for as long as she's allowed. After so much time hiding, hiding underground or in the desert or even in plain sight, the chance to be out in the open surrounded by air in water is, well...

Exhilarating. She finds herself smiling, even as the breeze steps up and blows freezing sea air into her face. She smiles and pulls her blanket closer.
She'd be far warmer in Mindfang's bunk, curled up around her pillow with a pile of blankets over her back and a fire crackling in the hearth. But-- well-- this is a moment to remember

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Mindfang sounds sad and more than a little broken, her voice unusually hoarse. Rosa turns to give her a questioning glance and, yes, she looks that way too, more than a little dejected. Her face is tense around her jaw and eyes and she looks more than a little worn down. It's not unusual because she often looks exhausted and stressed but Rosa hasn't ever seen her look quite this defeated.

"I'd die if you told me I couldn't be out here at sea, with the wind in my hair and my ship beneath my hands." Mindfang says with a wry laugh and a creak of the wheel.

"I can see why." Rosa murnurs, and they fall silent once more. The quiet lasts for a good ten minutes, during which Mindfang begins doing something with the wheel. Apparently it's something that will allow the ship a good degree of autonomy because soon Rosa has company on the poor little lonely table, Mindfang nuzzling up beside her. She kisses her softly, fingers curling beneath her chin and tilting her head back. It's a gentle kiss, their lips brushing but not doing much more. It still steals Rosa's breath away though, the simple affection of it all and the way her leather encased fingertips feel against her skin and how soft her skin is.

Mindfang breaks away after a while, kissing Rosa's forehead before settling in beside her. She attempts to drape her coat around Rosa -- decides this is a losing battle-- and pulls her into her lap instead. She wraps her coat around her, successfully this time, and they curl close together.

The idea of scolding her for her behavior or trying to get away has become increasingly unpalatable. Mindfang gives out affection like the majority of sailors let out curses, and attempting to inform her that she's behaving ridiculously has absolutely no effect.

And, well, Rosa isn't afraid to admit that she likes the company. Especially when the air is so cold that each breath she lets out rises like an icy cloud around them.

She shifts slightly in Mindfang's lap, turning so she can rest her head under the crook of her chin. Mindfang lets out a noise that sounds suspiciously like a pleased trill and pulls her coat a little more tightly around Rosa.

"Cold, darling?" She asks, squeezing her waist a little. Rosa shrugs as best as she can without dislodging the coat, unwilling to break the silence.

Mindfang's mind is clearly fathoms away, with the ocean instead of the ship beneath her feet. Rosa studies her with a frown before sighing softly. She wonders if Mindfang has anyone to talk to. The thought hadn't occurred to her before but, well--

She can't remember seeing Mindfang chatting with anyone so far-- and it's been a month. All things considered, talking to Marcus doesn't seem to be any indicator of friendship since he is, in fact, a necessary part of the ship. Same thing with the sailors. There's camaraderie there, but Rosa has never once walked in on a group of them playing poker with the captain. Just her, sitting there before a fireplace with a worn out old journal in her lap and a cup of tea.

"Am I here because you're lonely?" Rosa asks, quietly, not wanting to say it, but needing to know. Beside her, Mindfang tenses.

After a pause, she lets out a sigh from the depths of her stomach and gives Rosa a tight smile. "Perhaps."
"...Do you want to talk about it?"

"I don't know." She says, softly, wrapping her fingers around Rosa's hand, examining the pads of her fingers with a careful sort of intensity that almost frightens her. "I--"

She breaks off with a huff, her fingers making quick tracings over the lines etched in Rosa's palm as if the markings there can give her the solace she needs. Rosa wants to tell her what the lines mean, what each hairline fracture in her skin says about her fate, the hundreds of little things a single branch on a palm can mean. She wouldn't call herself superstitious, but she knows all of the world's stories, the things that make the world a more unique place-- the little traditions that build up a culture.

"You can talk to me." Rosa murmurs, curling her fingers around Mindfang's. "It's not as if I have anyone else to speak to, so you'll be in complete confidence."

Mindfang looks her over, her eyebrows arching sharply downwards. She looks as if she's about to speak, her fangs digging slightly into her lower lip. But then the door to the map room opens and her head snaps around so quickly that Rosa must duck in order to keep both her eyes.

"Oh. Sorry Capt'n." He looks them both over and when he catches Rosa's eye he salutes sharply. Mindfang stands, Rosa sliding from her lap with all the grace she can muster. She folds her hands behind her back and does her best to look professional. Given the fact that she's wearing a worn out sailor's blanket as a jacket, it's difficult. But not impossible. She bows her head in acknowledgement of Marcus' salute.

"Go back to my quarters." Mindfang snaps, suddenly, not even glancing over her shoulder as she snarls the order. "I don't have time for this."

Rosa feels almost as if she's been slapped, her breath flying from her lungs. "But--"

"GO, Rosa."

* * *

Sulking is not in her nature. She isn't a woman prone to allowing the woes of life affect her too strongly. Killing newborns? Easy. Watching her son die? Devastating, but so long as she ignores it she's okay. Being sold into slavery? Nice... until her Mistress decides she's bored of her.

This is what happens when you let yourself feel emotionally attached, Rosa, she scolds herself. You shouldn't think you matter to someone who paid for you. She's ashamed to rely on you.

But it's hard to keep her spirits up when she's doing nothing but try to make herself feel bad for being so foolish. She huffs and allows herself, for a few precious minutes, to give way to sulking. She pulls the throw blanket, this one a much nicer cashmere blend, up over her head and curls up on the sofa.

There's a fire in the hearth and she glares at it, pretending that it's the source of all her suffering over the years. She lets out the most feral growl she can muster at the logs smoldering in the grate and wonders if she'd feel any better if she threw things into it. Starting with Mindfang's hat.

No, no that's not a good idea. She's irritated, not blindly furious. But it still makes her feel better and after a minute more of angry sniffling she lets her blanket fall around her waist.

Okay. In 3 seconds you'll stop sulking and go make the bed. Three. Three, two, one. There. You're all better.

No. Damn. She's still angry. Rosa grumbles to herself, growls again because that did make her feel
An hour passes before she hears footsteps outside of the door, footsteps that stop just before the cabin. There's a soft, hesitant knock and Rosa wants to stab whoever decided to do that and force her to make a decision that could possibly get her beaten given Mindfang's mood.

Oh, fuck all.

"Come in," She says, her voice still a little harsh. The door opens with a squeak of poorly oiled hinges and Mindfang peers around the doorway.

"Hi." She says, avoiding Rosa's eyes. "Can I, um, come in?"

Rosa does her best not to glare, crossing her arms over her waist and then forcing her hands into a more neutral posture. She doesn't say a word but raises her eyebrows, pointedly.

"...Don't give me that face."

What? How does she possibly think that's going to garner a good response? "I don't know what you mean, Mistress."

She huffs and shuts the door with a bit of a slam. "Rosaaaaaaaa," she whines, pouting a little, "don't be mean."

"I'm not being mean."

"....I'm sorry." Mindfang says, quietly, locking the door behind her. "I-- I think I was more than a little curt before and that wasn't very fair of me."

Rosa doesn't say a word. She curls her fingers around the hem of her dress-- yet another borrowed article of clothing from Mindfang's seemingly endless wardrobe that's been haphazardly tailored.

Mindfang skulks over, her shoulders hunched and her face contorted by one of the most adorable scowls she's ever seen. When she gets close to her she flops down onto the ground like someone's flipped an off switch. Her chin lands in Rosa's lap and she stares up at her with a sad face that could turn the hardest heart to pastry dough.

"I don't talk about feelings a lot, okay? I don't do the whole... emotional shit. I mean, fuck. I'm a pirate."

"I understand perfectly, Mistress."

"And-- well--" She sighs, closing her eyes and nuzzling into Rosa's lap. It's a little too intimate of a position, but she's warm and it's rather nice to feel like Mindfang's the pathetic one for once instead of the one in power. "--And I can't actually remember the last time someone offered to look after me."

There aren't very many ways she can respond to that. So she breathes out sorry through her nose and says, hating herself with every syllable, "I thought that might be the case, to be perfectly honest."

They both fall absolutely silent, Mindfang making sounds of utter discontentment. Pacifying her is usually Rosa's first urge in moments like these but she can't bring herself to do anything but glower at the back of her head.

"Are we friends?" Mindfang finally asks, the words coming out uncomfortably bold in the silence of
her quarters. Rosa feels her spine rebel and she wants to shudder but, well...

Poor darling.

Poor, poor darling. How lonely must she be that she's relying on the truths told to her by a woman she purchased to feel like she's loved. Maybe that's giving herself too much credit. It probably is giving herself too much credit, but, well, she looks so sad and pathetic curled up against her calves, like a stray dog instead of a Pirate Captain.

She wants to get up and throw her arms around her, pressing her face into Mindfang's neck and reminding her that everything will be perfectly fine. But she can't do or say either of those things, so she settles for letting out a soft sigh.

"I think we're whatever you wish us to be, Mistress." Rosa says, a little more waspishly then she intends because, really, that wasn't meant to be mean. With a little more softness she presses her hands to the sides of Mindfang's face. She nuzzles into the touch, still looking incredibly trepidatious and frowning.

"But... I would be gratified to think we have a relationship that could be described as friendly."

"...Me too." She says, softly, and Rosa jolts a little. Even though she was expecting it, the significance of confirming that they're friendly is greater than she expected.

They both fall silent, Mindfang squeezing her hands so tightly she wants to tell her to stop but Rosa's a giver. No matter if it's her child or if it's her captor, doing anything but smiling softly and asking 'how do you feel, my lamb?' is unthinkable. She's impossible, absolutely impossible when it comes to denying people in need.

And, well, how do you say no to Mindfang, sitting there with her eyes wide and bright blue, shoulders slumped and face crumpled? There's no way she can look her in the face, the woman who bought her and has sheltered her and quite literally taken her in out of the cold, and tell her no, no I don't care, solve your own problems.

She's romanticizing things of course, because she's still a slave. She still has a collar buckled around her throat, she's still bound to her Mistress's every move and she's still-- well-- owned. A belonging. A spoiled pet, allowed to sleep in her Mistress's bed and eat from her hand and have full run of the house.

Even cats aren't collared, for goodness sake. But, well, she can't help it. The slightest bit of affection makes her turn her head like a sunflower towards the sky. Mindfang might not think of her as an equal but, well, damnitall, the woman is a creature in need.

And all things supposed, people do frequently consider their dogs to be their best friends, don't they? Loyal until the end. So, hesitantly, she bows her head and presses her lips to Mindfang's cheek. Her skin is cold beneath her lips, cold from the dawn air and her caste. When Rosa pulls away she's already beginning to go bright blue around the neck.

(Things that are unexpectedly adorable: Pirate Queens Blushing).

"Mistress, I don't know if it means anything to you--" She says, choosing her words delicately, "--but I've seen my share of heartache and I'm no stranger to other's troubles. My conscience will hardly be burdened by your concerns."

Mindfang lets out a huff that's not entirely frustrated but not entirely happy. Clearly, the idea of discussing whatever's upsetting her is not something she finds at all pleasant. But Rosa's more than
willing to bide her time, staring out across the ocean as if she doesn’t remember that they were even having a conversation.

"Have you ever done something that, no matter how hard you try, you can’t stop regretting it?" Mindfang asks, finally, crawling up onto the couch beside her and wrapping an arm around her shoulders. Rosa settles in beside her, curled up against her side.

Rosa isn't sure what to say to that. Not at all. Mindfang's regrets probably aren't anything she could ever hope to understand, ships un-plundered and treasures unburied and-- well-- whatever it is exactly that pirates do. What can she say to help her?

Mindfang shifts, clearly uncomfortable. There's another huff, this one far more angry, and then a quietly muttered: "See? Nothing to say."

"Tattoos," Rosa says, softly, as Mindfang seems to almost wilt beside her, her face forced into a deep frown. "I used to have tattoos."

"...The fuck?"

"When I was younger, and still a Sister, I used to spend hours covering myself in henna." Rosa says, softly, smoothing a hand over the lapels of Mindfang's coat. "I cut off my hair, too, and I most definitely thought I was the world's biggest badass."

Mindfang snorts dismissively, but she's smiling a little now, her fangs gleaming in the sunrise.

"Covered in piercings too," Rosa says, thoughtfully, reaching up to trail her fingers around the line of sapphire studs that go up the curve of her Mistress's ear. Mindfang arches into the touch with an amused smirk. "Ears, eyebrow, lip. The amount of metal sticking out of my face is, in retrospect, rather traumatizing."

"Oh, you sound incredibly kick ass."

"Combat boots, steel toed. Low cut shirts. The works."

"Oh my god I am imagining this--" Mindfang starts to choke. and Rosa can feel her shaking with poorly restrained laughter beside her. "--Oh my god, Rosa, Pet, you have to--"

Rosa cuts her off by laying her fingers against Mindfang's lips. It's a shockingly effective way of silencing her because she doesn't attempt to pull away or snarl or chew her fingers off-- she simply stops talking and stares, perplexed, at the fingers against her face.

"The point being sometimes I look back on that girl, so angry and ready to destroy everything the world had given her and want to bitch slap her into the next generation. Other days I look at her and want nothing more than to hold her close and tell her to cherish the time she has."

Mindfang is studying her now, her eyes narrowing to scrutinize her further and her lips quirking into an awkward smile beneath Rosa's fingers.

"I think that... whatever situation you're alluding to..." Rosa murmurs, haltingly, not sure how to phrase this without being too trite or overbearingly saccharine and not finding the perfect thing to say at all.

"...What I mean to say is that, we all regret what we do as children, the silly things we say and the moments we forget to savor but if you spend too much time looking back, you'll never get the chance to make things better."
It's not perfect, but it's close enough. Mindfang lets out an almighty sigh and nudges Rosa aside. Before Rosa knows what Mindfang intends she has a pirate curled up in her lap, looking up at her as if she wants nothing more than to hide in her arms.

"...Do you regret taking him?" She asks, her voice barely more than a whisper.

Rosa lets out a broken noise before she can convince herself Mindfang knows nothing. She slouches over, her head drooping to her chest. Working her fingers through Mindfang's hair is hard, but not impossible and she manages to run her fingers through a tangle of curls.

"No." She says without needing to think any further. "No, I don't."

Mindfang lets out a low hum of appraisal, studying her with a frown. "You don't regret it? You don't wake up in the morning and wish you'd-- well-- done something different?"

Rosa pulls her shawl around her a little more tightly, looking anywhere but at her Mistress's face. What can she say in response to that. Does she regret it? No. No, she said that and she meant it. But how do you explain that to a woman who's first love is the ocean? How does she put it into words what it means to be a mother, what it means to hold a tiny little creature in your arms and know he'd trusting you to keep him alive-- how do you put into words how wonderful it is to see him take his first steps, say his first words, make his first friends--

How can she put any of that into words? Words are fallible and small, arrangements of letters that are so small and so pitiful compared to the feelings that rise in her breast whenever she remembers him, her little boy. Her little one asleep against her chest while she hums a lullaby. Her little one clutching her for the last time murmuring: "I love you, don't watch, please Mother, it's not your fault, don't cry".

How does she say those things to her? How does she explain the smell of his hair, the feel of his hand in hers, small and strong as he promises he'll take on the world to make her smile. She can't. To try is to do him a vast injustice.

"Our lives have meaning." Is all she says, her voice low and husky as she swallows past a burning pain in the back of her throat. "No matter how painful it might be, things occur in our lives because it is necessary. We fight for what we love, but we cannot always succeed. What matters is that we tried."

Mindfang doesn't look at all satisfied with this and Rosa senses they're on the borderline of a metaphysical debate that she's not ready to get into right now, already digging her nails into her palms so hard she's drawn blood. Blood, blue green against her skin. Luckily for her Mindfang is nothing if not observant. Whatever comment she was forming dies in her throat and Rosa watches as her face softens into pity. She's not a woman used to thinking of others, but it appears she once was because she pulls Rosa's hands into her own and says with a small voice:

"I'm very sorry for your loss. I-- I didn't intend to upset you, darling."

And that's when the tears fall, just a few. She won't cry for him. She can't cry for him. She's not ready to tell herself that he's gone, that he's vanished, that his life was snuffed out like a candle wick collapsing into wax, burning brightly then dying in a blaze of white fire.

But it's hard to keep her heart still when she looks at the pirate kneeling before her looking so anxious and suddenly so young. She can see the abyss, Rosa realizes, see the abyss that he left behind when he was ripped from her, and she doesn't like it.
Mindfang wraps her arms around her almost timidly, pulling her head to her shoulder. She doesn't hug her so much as she crushes her, arms too used to hauling and lifting. But she's warm. Warm and smells like flowers and salt air, the smell of freedom above ground. Rosa slumps into her and lets herself be held.

"I'm not very good at this shit." Mindfang finally mumbles, pulling away hurriedly, with an awkward tangling of horns and hair. "I wish I could make it better."

"Thank you." Rosa murmurs with a bit of a strained smile and Mindfang, with a sudden look of pride, manages to locate her handkerchief again. She hands it to Rosa and stands slowly, awkwardly shifting from foot to foot. "But I don’t think anyone really can."

"...Don't like it when you cry." Mindfang says in a rush, pulling her hat back on and retreating rather quickly for the door. "You're prettier when you smile."

* * *

They're not quite friends, but it's a start. And when Rosa falls asleep that night it's with her head against Mindfang's shoulder as she holds her close and tells her stories, soft stories of places she's sailed and the people she's met, and then, in a whisper as they're falling asleep, "I miss her so much."

Rosa doesn't know who she means, nor can she begin to imagine who it might be. But her words are spoken sadly enough that Rosa knows whoever it is, she mattered and whoever it is, she's gone. So she curls a little closer and says just as quietly, "I know, dear. I know."
or, is it hot in here or is it just the pirate determined to fuck me?

Chapter Summary

Mindfang explains, in explicit detail, exactly what she'd like to do with Rosa. It does not, however, go anywhere, which is rather disappointing to both parties. But one goal is accomplished in that, well, at least she's entertaining the idea.

Chapter Notes

Sea-rious drama next chapter to make up for the gratuitous fluff this time around.

trigger warnings: graphic verbal descriptions of sexual behaviors. just a heads up, if you're not down with that... sorry )-:

When they make port for the first time, Rosa is terrified. Not because she's seeing solid ground for the first time in a little over a month, but because-- well-- it wakes her up. It wakes her up early, the ship bumping against the dock with a jolt that makes her fall halfway out of bed. Mindfang's still drowsing beside her and when Rosa slips out of her arms, she lunges and pulls her back. She lands on top of Mindfang with a loud rush of air going out of her lungs.

"All right?" She asks with a cute little yawn, nose scrunching up. Rosa's sprawled out on top of her, legs draped over her hips and her face dangerously close to her breasts. Mindfang doesn't seem to mind in the slightest but Rosa scrambles off of her as quickly as she can. A pair of arms wrap around her waist before she can run out of the bed.

"Pet, I don't like to give you orders," She says in a voice that's sweet as honey and warmed by sleep but still rather threatening. "But right now I need you to get your ass back under the covers and back up against me."

Rosa lets out a soft whine, her voice vibrating slightly.

"Close the curtains and get back here. I never get to sleep in and it's an exquisite pleasure to have you in my arms for once." Mindfang says, reaching out and trailing her fingers down Rosa's spine. "Please, Pet. Don't make me scold you."

She slides back under the covers. Mindfang wraps herself around her with a warm purr from the depths of her chest, her head cradled between her neck and shoulder. An arm drops around her waist and her fingers start to trace patterns over her ribcage.

Neither of them are asleep. Rosa knows that, for a fact. They're both awake, but in that nice way that always seems to come from knowing you have nothing to do.

There's a cacophony of noise coming from outside and Rosa asks, softly: "Have we made port?"

"Yes, darling." Mindfang says, turning her head and pressing her lips to her neck, warm and wet and
shiver inducing. She make a happy noise when she feels Rosa squirm and her lips keep moving, up to the nape of her neck and then skipping a few inches to her horns.

When Mindfang hooks a leg through her own and she feels a hand tracing up and down her spine, it becomes almost impossible to pretend she's not absolutely blissful.

"I know you keep saying we're friends," Rosa murmurs, yawning and letting out a small squeak when Mindfang's icy fingers slip beneath her robe to make circles on her shoulder. "But I can't ever recollect having a friend so interested in kissing me."

"I never said I was satisfied with just being friends." Mindfang mutters, softly, so softly that Rosa's almost sure she's misunderstood her. "Just said that I hoped we could be friends."

"...Um," Err. Um. How do you? How is she supposed to-?

"No pressure. Not going to make you do anything you don't want to."

"I think you keep forgetting you bought me."

"I think you keep forgetting there's honor among thieves and even more honor among women." Mindfang grumbles, letting out a sigh from her diaphragm. "Look, Darling, if you want to have sex with me, that's great. That's more than great. Realllllllly great, in fact. But if you're not interested, that's you know. A thing. I respect that."

"And what do you call constantly kissing me?"

"I call that my being a pirate, not a saint. You're an attractive woman. A very attractive woman, in fact. Asking me not to touch you is like informing me that I can't drink anymore. It's not going to happen." Mindfang presses her nose to her neck and, goodness, her face is cold but it makes Rosa giggle all the same.

"Fine. Me or alcohol."

"...In this scenario are you putting out?" Mindfang asks, nipping at her earlobe. Rosa mewls in mock pain and beside her Mindfang giggles.

"When I'm in the mood to bestow such favors."

Mindfang rolls her eyes and stretches out a little, smiling over at Rosa like she's the sun and Mindfang's a sunflower turning towards her. "Oh my god-- you are just-- you, okay? I'd choose you."

"I'm flattered." Rosa purrs, giving Mindfang her best seductive grin-- which, well, isn't very good at all. But she assumes Mindfang will appreciate the effort all the same.

"Yeah, and I'm horny." Mindfang mutters and then she's got her lips glued to her neck once more, this time making her way down to where her robe dips at the back. "I hope you realize what a monumental sacrifice I am hypothetically making for you."

Mindfang really does know what she's doing with her mouth. It's a wonderful experience, really, lips gliding over her flesh like satin except warm and wonderfully yielding.

"Oh, I do." Rosa says, sleepily, motivated by the toe curling tingling that comes along with Mindfang's lips pressing against her absolutely anywhere. "But I'd like to think I'd be worth it."
"I've already imagined you're worth it." Mindfang mutters, almost too quiet to hear. But Rosa feels her voice all the same, reverberating against her spine and she slowly slips her (stolen) robe off Rosa's shoulders. Rosa wants to scold her for being so assuming, but it's hard when it feels so exhilarating to have Mindfang's fingers against her, ghosting across the scars on her back without a single syllable raised in question. "You awful teasing minx."

Mindfang rests her chin just above the small of her back where the fabric of the robe is pooled. Rosa wraps her arms around her pillow and yawns, widely. Is this is what couples act like? She's not sure. But she's rather glad she's not obligated to do anything. Relationships, she thinks, seem like a rather inconvenient way to conduct things. Or perhaps she's just jaded.

Jaded before she's even had the chance to fall in love. Either way she has a gorgeous woman draped over her back taking her clothes off and intensely pursuing her without ever having to make a commitment.

"Is this is what being in love is like?" She asks, feeling self-conscious the moment the words leave her mouth.

Mindfang doesn't seem to take it the wrong way, however. She kisses her back once more and then crawls up to curl herself around her. She nuzzles into the back of Rosa's neck, her breath warm and moist against her skin. She draws little patterns on Rosa's exposed shoulder with her fingernails, faint scratches that make her shiver more than hurt.

"No." She says, quietly, pressing her lips to Rosa's neck and lingering for a long time. "No, it's not. It's much better to be in love."

Rosa shifts a little in Mindfang's bed, making a noise of quiet irritation when the buckle of her collar snags on the pillowcase. Mindfang reaches up and frees it. Then, to Rosa's surprise, she undoes the buckle and tugs it free from her neck.

Mindfang tosses it out of the bed and it clatters to the floor somewhere beyond the curtains. Rosa feels that the world has stopped for a few seconds. She's not scared, she's not shocked, she's not even grateful. She feels nothing except how strange it is to feel cool air against the strip of her neck where her collar has been for a year and a half. Has it been a year and a half? Or is it a year? Hmm...

The feel of Mindfang's fingers around her neck, gently brushing over her aggravated skin brings her back to reality. When Rosa flinches she lets out a soothing sound and drops her hand.

"What's it like?" She asks, softly, anxiously shifting around in the bed. Mindfang makes a grumpy sound but moves away from her, giving her space to stretch out before cuddling close once more. Rosa feels almost naked without her collar, her breath coming in a little differently. It's a good difference, though.

"I mean. Physically, it's similar, I suppose. But it is rather... special to have a lover paying homage to you." Mindfang's arm slips around her waist and she settles her head on the pillow beside her. "It's nice. Really nice. Don't settle for anything less."

Rosa doesn't know what to say. Partially because her mind is yards away with her collar, abandoned on the floor, but also because it's hard to imagine something so abstract. If she were in love with Mindfang, would it feel different to be lying her next to her? Would it feel better to have her hands on her body, to have her lips pressed against her own? She doesn't know why it should.

But-- Well-- She doesn't know how she feels about Mindfang. Her Mistress. She doesn't know how she feels about her Mistress, her Captain, her-- well-- her tarnished rescuer. How is she meant to
Afraid? Mindfang yawns, her jaw cracking loudly in Rosa's ear. Her lips press like a feather just beneath her earlobe. Should she be afraid of the slim figured woman curled up beside her, who's done nothing but spoil her?

Should she feel grateful? But she bought her, bought her with gold and took her liberty from her. So, no, gratitude isn't something she wants to show. But she is thankful for the kindesses she's being shown. To be anything but would invite disaster and pain.

"Come on now, Pet," Mindfang murmurs, pushing herself up on her forearms and leaning over to try to steal a kiss. "Don't be so pensive. It's love, not astrophysics."

Rosa smiles and leans into her kiss.

There's far more banging going on outside and now the shouting's getting ear splitting. She winces when one of the sailors swears a blue streak and Mindfang chuckles.

"I'll take that as my cue to get up." She squeezes Rosa's shoulder and smiles. With the adroitness of a woman clearly used to ship living she crawls over her and lands in a heap on the floor. Rosa doesn't laugh but she does press her face into her pillow to hide her smile.

Mindfang clambers to her feet a little more gracefully, her ridiculously dainty white nightgown settling around her. For once she doesn't insist on getting out of bed to help her dress, content to lay there with the coverlet draped over her. Mindfang dresses with more than usual care, abandoning her ostentatious pirate coat in favor of a more somber all-black affair, her hair brushed for once and tied away from her face. The sets of sapphires in her earlobes are the only indication of her blood color and it seems more than a little unusual.

"Alright, so here's the deal, Lambchop."

"No. I'm stopping you there."

Mindfang raises her eyebrows in a clear question of 'what gives you the right?' but Rosa doesn't back down.

"One of these days I'm going to have to spank you just because of that face of yours." Mindfang rolls her eyes and sinks onto the edge of the bed. Her perfume, freshly applied, is even stronger, and Rosa can make out the faint scent of peonies and musk beneath the jasmine.

"Fine. Pouty little thing." Mindfang leans over her for a kiss and her red lipstick is smudged. Rosa wonders if she can honestly get away with red lipstick or if that'll get her in trouble. "I'm going ashore, Pet, and you're staying here."

She's thankful. Incredibly thankful. She doesn't want to go ashore any more than she wants to think about her son, dead and gone. "Oh. Okay."

"Don't be sad. I'll bring you a present. It's just-- well--" She sighs, softly, and stares up at the ceiling of the cabin. "I've never docked her before. Don't know how they feel about women, don't know how they feel about politics and don't know how they feel about me. So I'll feel it out and maybe-- if you're good--"

"I'm always good."

"Yes, you are, cheeky slave." Mindfang murmurs, staring down at her with so much affection it
makes Rosa blush and turn away. "But if you don’t make any trouble while I'm gone, Pet, perhaps we’ll see about you coming with me tomorrow."

Rosa assures her she doesn't mind being left alone and after a few more lingering kisses, her Mistress rises off the bed and slips out of the door. She locks it behind her, which isn't exactly surprising, but it does hurt a little.

Ugh. You're being silly, Rosa, she scolds herself. Of course she doesn't trust you that much. Of course she doesn't. Of course she won't let you even the slightest chance for escape of course. But, she argues against her grumpy voice, she's left you in her quarters. You're not in a hold. You're warm in bed with your lips still tingling from her kissing you, instead of your back aching from welts. So stop whining.

It takes her another half hour to get out of bed, muscles full of languor. Make yourself useful, girl, she grumbles at herself. Earn your keep.

* * *

So she does. She starts by making the bed as exactly as possible, sheets pulled taut and duvet fluffed. There isn't a single feather out of place by the time she finishes, and for once she takes the time to tie the curtains back with perfectly shaped bows.

She throws open the doors to the balcony next, propping them open with the aid of a heavy vase and the desk chair. Fresh air streams in, and it's a welcome relief from the usual staleness. The ocean beyond is colored as bright as the hemospectrum, blues and greens and brilliant like jewels. If she could paint, she'd set this scene down, gulls cawing and waves crashing and the faintest darting dark shapes of fish beneath the water. The air is cold, but it's bracing, and she decides she can tolerate it if it means breathing clean air.

With sunlight filling the room, things look a little better. The darkness makes the room feel far more homey. She takes advantage of the fact that they've stopped moving to sweep out the fireplace, pouring the ashes over the rail of the balcony. She scrubs the ash out of the marble of the hearth as best she can without a brush and is reasonably satisfied when the marble becomes shiny-- not mirror gleaming, but shiny all the same.

The carpet gets shaken out, the bookshelf dusted and her Mistress's desk is cleared of everything that is clearly debris before someone unlocks the door.

Marcus leans inside and gives her a curious stare.

"Cleaning." Is all she says, realizing that being elbow deep in Mindfang's papers is probably not the best way to be found. "I swear-- I'm just--"

"Rosa, let's get one thing straight. I don't care what you're doing to the woman so long as it doesn't make her any more batshit than she already is. As far as I'm concerned, you can be planning to make lingerie out of the papers of Marque and do a striptease so long as it keeps her happy."

"...Shouldn't you be ashore doing something other than irritating me?"

"Nope. Staying with the ship. Not exactly welcome on this side of the continent."

* * *

Mindfang reappears around noon and stops by only briefly to tell her that, no, she doesn't think it's a good idea to bring her ashore because *reasons, god, stop asking, aren't I the one in charge anyway?*
Just shut up for once' which isn't the nicest answer.

But she relents and kisses her with a huff, saying: "Darling, I had to punch a man to convince him that he could sell me non-perishable food items without a man present, I'm not in the best of moods."

Rosa assures her she doesn't mind, and Mindfang bustles around the room, throwing on new clothes and carrying out an irate conversation with Marcus through the open door.

She sits in a corner of the cabin, largely unnoticed, with one of Mindfang's journals lying open in her lap. Mindfang gives her a curt smile before vanishing from the room without a word.

This is really sort of... well... alienating. She doesn't like it in the slightest, being ignored in favor of something more exciting. What is she, a three year old? Apparently so, given how she's behaving.

"Alright Pet, I'm heading ashore for the night." She says, letting out a soft hum of excitement. She looks happier than Rosa's seen her in ages, her face bright and youthful. It's hard to be angry with her when she looks so relaxed, so young and at ease. "I'll be back late."

"Take a shawl, it's chilly out." Rosa murmurs absently, glancing up from her book with a frown. Mindfang's not even wearing a hat, her still damp hair falling down her back in a tangled mass of waves. Her coat is half buttoned and she's only halfheartedly draped her scarf around her. The temperature's dropping into the thirties and the woman doesn't even have the common sense to bundle up? Ridiculous. Rosa sniffs and wraps her fingers around her teacup. It's not her place to comment, of course. But she'll be damned if she doesn't at least assuage her conscience.

"Who the fuck wears shawls anymore?" Is what she grumbles in response, pulling on her ridiculous feathered hat instead of a nice wooly one that would have proper insulation. It's clearly a gesture only meant to quiet Rosa's complaints. "No one wears shawls."

"I wear shawls." She mutters softly, taking a draught from her teacup and swirling the dregs of tea leaves around. "I like shawls. They're nice."

"...Do you now?"

The way she says it is enough to make Rosa sit up straight and spill her tea all over a journal entry regarding the current state of politics that appears to have been written by a very drunk woman. She huffs loudly at herself and begins to blot at the paper with the hem of her dress. Mindfang snorts and rolls her eyes.

"My my myyyyy. I have personal information about my favorite little Pet now. How in the world am I going to be able to use this against you?"

"I like to wear shawls." Rosa mutters, rolling her eyes. "It's a rather difficult fact to misconstrue, I imagine. Although you are free to inform sweater manufacturers that I find their creations tacky and uncomfortable, I suppose, but that would be rather libelous--"

"Oh just shut up and let me have fun for once." She grumbles, wrinkling her nose and glaring before leaning against the door frame.

"Enjoy yourself, Mistress." She calls, giving her a warm smile.

Mindfang gives her a guilty smile and hesitates a little before speaking. "Sorry, darling, it's nothing personal, but I'm going to lock you in."
"I understand." She says, giving her the best smile she can muster. ".I'm not going to run."

"Mmmm that's not my concern, Pet. I'm more concerned about you being spirited away." Mindfang, looking even guiltier, steps inside the room and shuffles over, awkwardly wrapping her arms around her.

"I promise to buy you something nice." Mindfang murmurs, holding Rosa's head tight against her shoulder. It's an incredibly protective gesture. ".And I'll see about taking you with me tomorrow, hmm?"


"Shut up. I'll bring you presents and then we'll make out."

"Only half of that phrase is appealing."

"Oi. Oi. Watch it, you little jaded minx or I will spank you senseless." She jabs a finger in Rosa's direction. "You know you like presents, don't pretend you don't."

"I don't mean to be rude, Mistress, but sometimes I get rather concerned that your ego might one day interfere with your better judgment."

"I don't mean to be rude, Mistress, but sometimes I get rather concerned that your ego might one day interfere with your better judgment." She sighs, dismissively, and gives Mindfang a grin. Mindfang smiles back and leans over the back of the couch. She kisses Rosa softly, nipping at her lower lip before drawing away.

"You spoil me with your concern, Pet. What in the world did I do to merit such love and affection?"

Rosa wants to say: 'You bought me and now you own me and you've taken good care of me, therefore you merit my affection'. But she also wants to say 'because you need it more than anyone I've ever known'.

Neither of those phrases, however, are acceptable. So she blushes and stares down at her lap, wringing her hands. Mindfang departs with an admonishment to behave and a reminder that someone will stop by with dinner. Rosa spends her day perusing Mindfang's journals and pretending she's not dying to run over to Mindfang's wardrobe and wash her clothes.

She'd already spent the entire morning of Mindfang's absence cleaning, after all, and to no avail, since Mindfang doesn't seem to notice a difference.

But it makes her feel a lot better anyways. To know that she's done something to earn her keep, to do something to make herself feel... well... meaningful. And the room looks cozier now that it's clean, the polished woodwork gleaming warmly.

The day passes slowly, though, alone in Mindfang's cabin with no one for company. She'd prefer to have Mindfang here with her, especially after the way they started the morning, curled up together. She misses it-- the warmth of someone else at her side. The warmth of her voice against her throat, the warmth of knowing she's--

Ugh this is ridiculous. Getting melancholy because the woman who bought you has left you for a few hours. Rosa, you should be ashamed of yourself.

Still, she falls asleep alone and feeling abandoned after one of the sailors left behind to guard the Widow brings her dinner. Stretched out on the couch with a satin pillow underneath her cheek and a heavy wool blanket over her shoulders, she's warm and cozy and the lullaby of crackling wood is
impossible to ignore, but she'd prefer to have Mindfang's voice purring behind her and her arms holding her close.

She dreams of just that. For the first time in ages she doesn't have nightmares about singing flesh and screaming children-- she dreams of sitting on a beach in the sunshine while Mindfang builds a sandcastle that is preposterously high and attempts to convince her that they should live there. It doesn't make sense, but it's endearing all the same.

It makes even less sense when it ends mid-argument, her sleep broken by the feel of cold fingers against the back of her neck. She awakens with a gasp and a jolt, but doesn't sit up because, well, she's cognizant enough to realize that it's just her Mistress... being her Mistress.

"Why are you always sleeping? It kind of makes me worried."

Mindfang is crouched beside her, looking more than a little worse for the wear. Her hair is a little ruffled, her eyes are slightly bloodshot but she seems happy, happy and contented. She's chilly, chilly but in a way that makes her think of the world outside.

She yawns and covers her mouth with the back of her hand. "I missed you."

"Am I not giving you enough sunlight or something? 'Cause I can leave you in the window or something." Before Rosa can sit up Mindfang is kissing her, their noses bumping before their teeth clash. It's an awkward, fumbling kiss, probably because Rosa's stretched out horizontally and Mindfang's still mostly vertical. But it's a kiss all the same, warm lips and cold hands curled around her jaw in a soft caress.

"I'm not a houseplant." Is all she can think to say when Mindfang finally pulls away, reaching out sleepily to pluck her hat off her head. "We don't wear hats inside, we're not heathens."

Mindfang scrunches up her nose and bares her teeth. She doesn't put her hat back on, however, which is a small victory. "Oh. Forgive me, darling, I gave the Butler the night off so I supposed we might try something exotic for once. Clearly you're still fuming over the debacle with the Duchess of Kent at last fortnight's dinner party."

Rosa rolls her eyes and sits up a little bit, rubbing at her face in an effort to take off the vestiges of sleep. It's hard to be clever when she's just woken up, but Mindfang doesn't seem to understand that. "Yes, well, Lord Marchbank called. It appears that our daughter has run off with their stable hand to get married over the anvil."

"Oh, heavens! Wait, which daughter-- the one I like or the one I'm mean to but only because I believe she has the potential to become a much greater person?" Mindfang stretches out on the floor next to the couch, faking a dramatic swoon and then, well, staying there on the floor.

Rosa sighs and bends over, pulling a few shards of glass out of Mindfang's hair. On a scale from one to drunk, she is a toaster. Rosa wonders if she should get angry about that, but then realizes-- fuck it--who cares. She's entitled to have her fun, but, how in the hell does someone end up with fragments of a wine bottle in their hair?

"We have more than one fictional daughter?"

"I don't know. I just kind of assumed we were one of those families that didn't want to stop at one kid."

Mindfang hauls herself up into Rosa's lap with a melodramatic groan of effort, dropping her head against her knees. Her words start to slur as she finishes her sentence. "Besides, you know I'd probably accidentally drop the first one down the stairs or something."
"First of all, you kill our fictional children off and I fictionally divorce you." She rolls her eyes but stifles a laugh because, oh goodness, she can see Mindfang with a child in her arms, alternating between fussing like a mother hen and requesting a squalling infant to 'man up' and 'stop fucking around'. "And second of all, just how long have you been drinking?"

"Only a little, Pet."

Not a correct answer to the question, but, well, it's a lie either way so she laughs. Mindfang gives her a wicked grin and then tries to climb up onto the couch with her. It doesn't work too well; with Rosa still stretched out there's not too much room. She finally figures things out, however, by draping her legs over the couch's arm and settling her upper body against Rosa's. "I brought you a present, though."

"Your presence isn't enough of a blessing?" Rosa chides, softly, stroking her hair off of her face. Mindfang's weight is surprisingly non-intrusive; she's slim and light and she's not at all a burden.

"Not drunk enough to let you get away with that bullshit." Mindfang grumbles, shoving her head hard. Rosa drops her head back in order to preserve the illusion that she's been properly disciplined and Mindfang laughs. "Do you want your present or not?"

"...Yes, I want my present please."

"Yeah, that's what I thought." Mindfang mutters, and then she's reaching into her coat. She fumbles around in her pockets for a few moments-- it really is an impressively large coat, Rosa thinks with an arch of an eyebrow, while secretly hoping she's not about to receive jewelry-- before pulling something out with a triumphant caw.

It's a bundle of something haphazardly wrapped up in plain paper with a ridiculously ornate ribbon that's clearly a late addition, blue satin with gold floral embroidery.

"I like the ribbon." She says with a smile and Mindfang grins and giggles a little. Her cheeks are beginning to turn a little blue around the temples. Awww, how sweet. She's embarrassed.

"Just open it alreaddddddy." Mindfang whines, tugging anxiously at Rosa's sleeve. "I wanna see your faceeee."

Drunk Mindfang is, quite possibly, one of the most adorable things she's ever seen. Usually when Mindfang's intoxicated Rosa's equally indisposed and unable to appreciate it. Rosa rolls her eyes but tugs at the end of the bow. It comes undone easily, but she still takes her time removing it from the package. She wraps it around her neck and Mindfang lets out an appreciative hum.

"You look nice in blue."

Rosa nods, softly, and runs her fingernails beneath the tape securing the paper. It gives way without too much effort and Mindfang grins widely.

"Opennn it, stop being slowwwww."

For once, she does as told. Rosa undoes the paper and a pile of fabric spills out into her lap. She drops the paper to the floor and lifts it up. It becomes almost immediately apparent that it's a shawl, knit from a gorgeous silk yarn into an intricate pattern. It's the color of forest foliage at sunset, a deep green flecked with shades of blue and when she holds it up to the fire there's a gorgeous sheen to it.

"Mistress..." She says, a little breathlessly. Her eyes go wide as she unfolds it completely. It's almost a work of art, a gorgeous damask pattern worked in with contrasting yarns. It's soft and perfect and
absolutely wonderful. "This is-- I mean-- It's-- I don't know what to say."

"...You don't like it."

"No. No, Mistress, it's... It's beautiful. I love it. Thank you."

"Do you really?"

"Yes. Thank you."

"I couldn't decide between that one and the lacy one. But then I remembered that you're always cold so I figured you'd like this one 'cause it's warmer." Mindfang's purring in her lap, her words rumbling a little. If she was a golden retriever, her tail would be wagging hard enough to break a vase. "Do you really like it?"

"Yes, I do."

"Good." Mindfang hums, loudly, wrapping her arms around her waist and kissing her. It's still pretty sloppy, but, well, Rosa doesn't mind. Should she? Probably. "Fuck, you're not drunk enough for me to be around you."

"Not drunk at all, in fact."

"...Yeah, that's a problem because the thoughts going through my head are farrrrrrrrrrrr from appropriate, if you, uh, know what I mean."

Mindfang kisses her once more and slips off of her, waltzing-- almost literally waltzing-- over to her bar. She pours a drink and Rosa's not surprised when it's passed to her. Now that Rosa's unwrapped her present she seems far less anxious and is looking like a contented cat.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean." Rosa says, as primly as she can around a mouthful of what tastes like straight whiskey. Oh goodness that burns. "Quite sure."

"Don't play this gaaaaaaame, Pet. I'm drunk and happy and really really really really really--"

She narrows her eyes and glares down at her feet. "And I can't say what else I am."

"Why not?"

"Because it's awkward. Really really, really, really--"

"Awkward?"

Mindfang frowns, almost pouting. She's beginning to shift back into her pirate persona, an attitude and stance that Rosa hasn't seen in well-- weeks, since Mindfang dragged her up from below decks and left bruises around her neck. It's frightening, but in a rather... exhilarating sort of way.

This is bad. This is incredibly bad. Attracted to danger? Since when has she been attracted to danger. She's spent her whole life running from it! Hiding under trees and bushes, living in caves-- the things she's done to avoid the slightest hint of anxiety, evening going as far to delude herself from seeing what's occurring around her, is almost... horrific.

Now, enslaved, she feels safe for the first time in years. And while she doesn't want to admit it, safe is not synonymous with content. Mindfang's given her stability, yes, but--

This is getting boring. If she's going to be trapped on board a pirate ship, she's going to have a little
excitement. Even if it kills her. Which it probably will. But going down with the ship is a hell of a lot
ter than going down with the empire.

She swishes the liquid around in the base of her glass, listening to the ice clink against glass.
Mindfang sniffs, dismissively, and makes a disgruntled noise.

Rosa raises her eyebrows and stares at her. She rolls her eyes and slips her jacket off. "Awkward,
Mistress. You were going to say awkward."

Mindfang rolls her eyes. She shrugs off her coat and, of course, she looks stunning underneath. She
can get away with wearing shockingly tight clothing and make it look good and-- well-- Rosa can't
help but stare. Mostly at her breasts. And her legs, oh god those legs. The woman looks good in
leather boots. Phenomenally good.

"You said it before I could say it." Mindfang murmurs, giving her a remarkably wicked smirk.
"Naughty girl. I should punish you for that, you know."

"Why is it awkward?" Rosa asks, sipping at her drink once more because she is not drunk enough
for this at all, nor does she want to acknowledge Mindfang's scolding. It's clearly not a threat. It
sounds more like a proposition, the kind of proposition that gets whispered in your ear beneath the
cover of darkness.

Rosa is still staring at her, and when Mindfang seems to finally process the fact that she's being
admired, she lets out a smug laugh. She slinks over with a horribly wonderful smile, leaning over
her. Instead of leaning down to kiss her, like Rosa expects, she wraps the shawl around her
shoulders.

"Because, Pet," She breathes, pressing her lips just beneath her ear and lingering, fingers slipping
down the silk of the shawl and lingering too long. "Because I don't want to upset you."

"I'm curious to know what's so awkward that you can't tell me when you quite literally own me."

"I'm really fucking horny, okay? And I really, really, really--" She swings her hair back over her
shoulder, staring Rosa down. With a needlessly dramatic sigh she drops onto the couch beside her,
stretching out. "--Want to fuck you."

"Oh. Well." Rosa blinks, shocked. Okay, in retrospect she should have expected that response. What
else would she have to be frustrated about, after all, that she can't have?

The solution to the problem, however, isn't as simple to discover. Well, it is, but-- Oh, fuck all, it's
obvious. Ignore it. So she does, pretending that she's not blushing a florid green, or that her hands
shake as she reaches up for Mindfang's face.

Mindfang nuzzles into her touch, closing her eyes and allowing her face to relax. It's a remarkably
endearing face, vulnerable and unguardedly blissful.

Before Rosa can talk herself out of it, she's kissing her, lips pressing against Mindfang's timidly
before she gains confidence by way of an arm wrapping around her waist and urging her on. She
crawls over Mindfang slowly, hands wrapping around her neck and lips working softly across hers.
When Mindfang moves to deepen the kiss she parts her lips without comment and melts into her a
little more. She's remarkably yielding beneath Rosa's hands as they begin to quest, darting from her
chin to her waist to her thigh in an attempt to find a comfortable place to rest. Mindfang responds
best to the trailing of her fingers over her thigh, trilling against Rosa's lips in a way that makes her
heart speed up and heat rush between her thighs. Oh god she's never felt like this before. Or, well,
she has, because Mindfang always does this to her, but she's never been in control like this, never the
one making Mindfang squirm and struggle to keep from making a fool of herself. Although, perhaps
Mindfang doesn't think that expressing her pleasure is something embarrassing? Probably.

When Mindfang's hands finally begin to move, Rosa's exhilarated and terrified to find they slip
directly between her legs. Her fingertips dig into the soft flesh of her inner thighs and start to form a
trail, moving heart stopping close to her before slipping back, down to the backs of her knees where
she's just as sensitive but less nervous to be touched and then they're both panting and shaking. Rosa
keeps up the kiss as best she can, determined not to be the one to give in.

It's Mindfang who finally pulls away, dropping her head back over the arm of the couch and panting.
Rosa allows herself a small smile of victory before dropping her head to her collarbone, carefully
avoiding stabbing Mindfang with one of her horns.

"You can't do this to me," She manages to croak an Rosa can hear the pounding of her heart. "You
can't. There's only so long I can be a good person before I'm going to rip your clothes off and let hell
take the hindmost."

"...Why don't you?"

"What?"

She swallows, swallows and takes a deep breath.

"Why haven't you fucked me yet?" She asks, quietly, staring at the ice melting in her drink. The
room goes silent, save for the shifting of burning wood in Mindfang's fireplace. Her words have cut
through the languid atmosphere of the night far more deftly than she'd expected they would. It was
meant as a casual question, after all. A simple request for a fact to be stated outright. It is, after all, a
subject that was brought up without ceremony just a few hours ago.

Mindfang doesn't say a word. Rosa's almost worried that she's fallen asleep in her drunken stupor
and now she's going to have to work up the courage to ask Mindfang why she hasn't been thrown
onto the nearest horizontal surface and thoroughly debauched twice instead of the expected once.

She doesn't like talking about sex. Okay-- well-- that's a lie. Lately she's been more than happy to
listen to Mindfang's attempts at seduction. It's flattering and she rather enjoys flattery at the moment.
Or is it flattery when her sole objective is to get her into bed? There must be a specific word for such
behavior but, well, as aforementioned, she doesn't give any fucks about that at the moment.

Amendment to previous statement. She doesn't like thinking about sex. It's awkward and unpleasant
and more than a little depressing, A) because she doesn't have anyone to have sex with and B)
because she's not entirely sure if it's kosher to want to have sex with the woman who's bought you
off the black market. She wants to say it isn't, but at the same time-- well, either way it's complicated
and unpleasant and she'd much prefer to go back to living a life of cloistered chastity and never
having to deal with any of this nonsense. Except, well, that she's been considering what it might be
like to have Mindfang's arms around her, warm and welcome in the chill of the northern air, bodies
pressed together, skin slipping against skin.

She doesn't even really like being touched, come to think of it. People touching her means that
they've got power over her and she does not appreciate being oppressed in any shape or form. Which
is ironic, considering her current situation, sitting on a pirate ship with her neck and wrists still chafed
from her collar and cuffs. Drinking brandy out of a sapphire inset crystal tumbler with the Marquise
Spinneret Mindfang sitting in the chair across from her fully decked out in a feathered hat and a
gorgeous full length jacket and a pair of perfectly fit leather boots. She doesn't like being touched...
unless it's Mindfang doing the touching.

And if it's Mindfang doing the talking, with those gorgeous red painted lips, maybe she can be convinced to change her mind about the whole touching thing. If the argument is strong enough. And. Well. If it comes in the form of an implausibly gorgeous pirate.

No. Bad Rosa. Bad. You're not supposed to want her to take advantage of this situation. And she doesn't, not really. She's terrified to hear what Mindfang's going to say. She's on her hands and knees praying-- figuratively of course-- that the answer is going to be: 'because you're not my type and I find you disgustingly unattractive and I've only been flirting with you because, well, why not' because then her situation is simple. Keep her clothes neat, make the bed and ensure that tea gets served on time.

Because if the answer is anything different-- if the answer's anything but 'well, quite frankly, I'm just not that interested'-- she doesn't know what she's going to do.

She suddenly remembers exactly what situation she's waiting on when she hears a pair of boots plant themselves solidly onto the floor. Mindfang might not be a physically powerful woman-- she's slim of figure and of shoulder width and, while she's tall, she's more 'statuesque' than intimidating. But she has a presence that's powerful, that rushes up to you like the riptide of a current and before you're aware of it you're thirty yards out in the ocean without knowing how you got there.

Mindfang is impossible to ignore when she wants the spotlight. And at the moment she's demanding the spotlight in no uncertain terms.

"Why haven't I fucked you yet?" She says softly, her voice coming out more than a little sultry, as if she's been drinking honeyed rosin for the past half hour instead of overpriced red wine at what was probably a seedy pirate tavern. "Ohhhh Pet, you have no idea."

"No. I don't, actually." Rosa says, which is rather stupid given the situation. "I don't know anything about anything when it comes to-- well-- this--"

"Then, darling, then let me tell you." Mindfang leans over her with a wicked smirk, her fingers curling around the arms of Rosa's armchair. Rosa stiffens a little and widens her eyes because suddenly Mindfang is far too close, but not anywhere near as close as Rosa needs her to be. "Let me tell you exactly what I want to do with you.

"I would like nothing more than to rip your clothes off, my dear." She purrs, trailing the fingers of her left hand down across the left side of her face to the curve of her neck.

There's just a hint of her nails scratching against Rosa's skin and it's just enough to make her flesh twitch beneath her fingers. "I want to undo each one of those pearl buttons going down the back of that dress of yours with my teeth and I'd be damned if you don't feel my tongue going down your spine the entire way."

Her drink falls from her hand. The glass shatters on the deck, but neither of them move to pick it up or mop up the spilled whiskey. Rosa's flushing now, her fingers digging into the upholstery of the armchair arms.

"Ohhhh, you like that? Good to know," Mindfang whispers, pressing her lips to Rosa's ear. "Mmmm yes, of course you would, dear. And, I would be very careful not to pop any of them off because you'd be quite upset if I did that, wouldn't you?"

Rosa wants to tell her that this is hardly the appropriate time to be teasing her for such things, but, oh
"And, trust me darling, I want to get you stark naked against my sheets-- that gorgeous skin of yours gleaming against the blue silk of my bed." Mindfang curls her fingers around Rosa's neck and her flesh is cold yet yielding. She moves a little closer, so that they're at eye level with one another.

"In fact, at this very moment I would like nothing more than to be wrist deep between your legs with you wrapped around me, exploring places I am readily assured no one has ventured before." She whispers, all but crawling into her lap, their lips separated by the space of a few scant inches. Rosa lets out a choked gasp because fuck, this is not the answer she'd been anticipating and what does any of that even mean but it sounds delectable and oh god she's not done talking--

"I imagine you'd be very warm darling, warm and more than ready for me after all this time. Don't think I haven't noticed how excited you get when I kiss you." She purrs, and there's a trace of teeth down her neck.

Rosa tries to breach the gap between them but she's rebuffed by a snap of teeth into the flesh of her neck. She falls back into her chair with a groan, not bothering to hide how aroused she is. "And I suspect you'd be a rather vocal lover, wouldn't you? Gasping for breath and begging for me to touch you before I'd even moved past your breasts."

This is beginning to become borderline unacceptable. The need to shove Mindfang out of her lap and tackle her onto the floor is making itself known quite strongly. But she's looming over her and she's completely trapped. She wants to hide, hide anywhere she doesn't have to look at Mindfang's face and her warm, smug smile and feel her hands against her face--

"Oh, Pet," She croons, looking more smug than anyone has a right to, but oh fuck it all is she wonderful. "I'd imagine you'll be just as shy when I make love to you, trying to cover yourself and panting for me not to look, not to laugh but, mmmm, you have absolutely nothing to hide from your Mistress, now do you? And I can assure you I'm more than satisfied with my purchase."

That should not be this arousing. That should not be this arousing whatsoever because, dammit Rosa, she just outright said that she bought you because she wants to fuck you but oh fuck is it hot all the same. Hot and flattering.

"I can practically see it now, having to nip at your neck and threaten to tie you to my headboard before you move your hands away from your breasts and let me see my prize and, darling, I assure you I'll make things well worth your anguish."

She's right. She's so right. It's despicable but she's completely correct.

"Come to think of it, I'm reasonably sure I'll end up having to tie you to my headboard whether you obey me or not, because let's face it Pet-- you're a scratcher. But maybe we'll have to save that for the second time, because perhaps you'll be too timid to touch me?"

Is this a conversation now? Is she expected to contribute? She can't do that right now. She's too busy pressing her thighs together and whining. She's already clawing at Mindfang's arms, desperately trying to get her attention but she's keeping herself a steadfast inch away, teasing her. Oh god has she been doing this to her this whole time?

Horribly, she hopes so.

"My poor little thing," Mindfang croons, reaching up with a hand that's far too steady to brush her hair behind her ears. Rosa pushes herself into her touch, keening loudly and pressing her lips to the
palm of Mindfang's hand. "I think it you'd be incredibly overwhelmed by all of this, and I'm terribly sorry to say it, but when I finally delve between those pretty little thighs of yours I don't think you're going to enjoy it very much at first."

Oh. Oh dear. What does she mean? What does she mean by that?

"Darling don't look so scared, you can hardly expect for every second of your... um... deflowering, was it? To be completely enjoyable." And now she's in her lap outright, her knees slipping to either side of her hips and Mindfang sucks at her neck once more, her hands running up and down her arms in a gesture that would be soothing if things weren't so overtly sexualized.

"But you know I'll do my best." She whispers, her lips ghosting over her ear, "And you know you'll get through it, don't you? I won't do any of it intentionally. But you have to remember that it's going to be a lot of new sensations. And, my turtledove, I promise I will take things slow. One finger slipping inside you at a time, only once you're ready, only once you're prepared."

She tries to reach up and pull her close but Mindfang snarls a little and snaps her teeth in a clear gesture of dominance. This is her show, apparently, and Rosa hasn't been asked to participate.

"Judging by how worked up you are right now, I don't think getting you aroused enough to be comfortable won't be very hard." Mindfang murmurs, relaxing once more and nuzzling in close. She smells like heaven, a mix of brandy and expensive jasmine perfume.

Half of this is going over her head, she's sure. But judging from how hard she's struggling to get Mindfang to touch her she's pretty sure she's getting the gist of it. How she's going to accomplish that she doesn't know, but she does her best by wrapping one of her legs around her and rocking close.

"And, my darling little Pet, the fantasy of you choking on my name as you finally reach climax for the first time in your life with my fingers deep inside you is what's been keeping me warm at night since the day we met."

"Then.... Then why--?" Rosa manages to pant and Mindfang nips at her jaw before fastening her teeth around her earlobe and tugging, hard. Her hands are at her waist, warm and welcome but keeping her trapped against the armchair.

"Why haven't I fucked you senseless yet?" She asks with an arch of her eyebrows. "Well, darling, that's obvious."

She slips out of her lap with a heavy sigh, dropping her head into her hands. Her heart pounding, Rosa slumps against the back of her chair and lets out a soft whine.

"Because. It's no fun unless you want it too. And while I might be despicable-- while I might spend my every waking moment burning and pillaging the high seas, I do have standards you know," She says with a huff, glaring up at Rosa as if she's somehow insinuated something deeply hurtful about her character. "I'm not one to force my pleasure where it's not wanted. I told you as much this morning."

"...I think that's something I would like very much at the moment." Rosa says, softly, her face heating up even more as she says it aloud.

"Yes, but that's only because I got you worked up."

"Isn't that what you meant--?"

Mindfang rolls her eyes and turns to give her a dismissive glare. Her multi-pupiled eye is incredibly
of putting but oh god it's still attractive. "Can you honestly tell me, Pet, that if you didn't want to have sex with me and I asked you to that you'd refuse me?"

"...No." She says, deflating a little because-- well-- she has a point.

"I thought as much." Mindfang lets out a grumble that's absolutely incoherent. "So. You know. I'm not going to try anything."

"...Never?" She asks, softly and Mindfang snorts.

"Fuck that. You say the word when we're both sober and I'll be more than happy to find the nearest available flat surface."

* * *

They end up making out on the couch again. It's more than a little messy, Mindfang's teeth pinching hard enough to bruise and, in one instance, draw blood, and Rosa accidentally following Mindfang's rather explicit fantasy by scratching several long blue lines down her arms. To her credit Mindfang doesn't say 'I told you so' but she does give her a wicked smirk when she finally pulls back to catch her breath and assess the damage.

"My my. Someone likes to play rough." Mindfang purrs, her eyes still shadowed by lust and glinting in the firelight. She looks like a panther, a gorgeous cerulean eyed panther. The sudden mental image of lying naked in a pile of furs comes to mind and Rosa frowns at herself. Bad Rosa. Bad.

"Sorry, Mistress." She whispers, her voice a little hoarse. "But I think you're corrupting me."

"...Yeah, and on that note you're going to bed." Mindfang sits up with a grumble, helping her out of her lap. Rosa stands on shaking legs and stares at her, more than a little nervous.

"I'm going to bed?" She asks, frowning a little. Mindfang nods and runs her fingers through her hair. She lets her fingernails dig into her horns a little bit and, well, it's wonderful.

"Yes. You're going to bed. I'm-- I'm going to go to bed too." She's yawning now, pulling her close for a hug. Rosa nuzzles in, unwilling to be parted so soon. She's enjoying this, the touching and smiling and ridiculousness.

"Um--"

"You sleep here. I'll-- I'll sleep somewhere different."

"Do you have to?" Rosa asks, softly, and her voice cracks. Mindfang gives her a smile and runs her thumb over her lower lip. She gives her a kiss that's gentle and breathtaking and utterly perfect.

"Yes. Because as... cliché as it sounds, I don't think I'll be able to control myself much longer. I'm drunk, you're beautiful, we're kissing constantly--"

She kisses her again to illustrate the point and it's even better than the last time. Rosa curls her hands around her shoulders and all but swoons.

"--And if you think I'm going to be able to remain a woman of my word and share a bed with you, Rosa, you've severely overestimated my self-control."

"I don't want to sleep alone." She whispers, sounding more pathetic than she meant to. "Don't leave me."
Mindfang tsk and shakes her head. "Oi. You're sleeping alone in my bed. Isn't that enough of a sacrifice without making me feel like shit?"

Rosa doesn't say a word, but she does frown and stare at her feet. Mindfang groans and rolls her eyes and Rosa suddenly feels a pair of hands at her waist, shaking her a little bit.

"By the way, before I go-- I, um, I wanted to let you know..." She trails off, coloring a little and glancing awkwardly away from her face. "I'm um, I'm really fond of you."

"I'm glad to hear it, Mistress." She murmurs, blushing. Rosa doesn't know if she's reading into it but she feels that 'fond' isn't what she means. She's pretty sure that she means something more. Her guess is confirmed when Mindfang gives her a wide, unadulterated grin. "The feeling is, um, mutual."

Mindfang trills. This time it's a proper trill, perfectly pitched and expressing just the right sentiment. Rosa trills in return and leans into the feeling of Mindfang's arms around her, holding her tight.

"Good night, Miss Rosa." She murmurs, kissing her forehead. "Sleep tight. Be a good girl."

Rosa, mustering her courage, kisses her softly on the lips. The electric tingling that arises when their lips touch is, well, startling.

"I always am, Mistress." She breathes, pulling away just slightly. Mindfang's looking at her with undisguised affection, an expression that's so sweetly vulnerable Rosa can barely swallow past the swelling in her chest. Her breath is coming in slowly, like molasses, and for the first time in her life she thinks that, perhaps, falling in love wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. "Sweet dreams."
or, do you really need to pick a fight just go make out with her

Chapter Summary

Rosa's not sure of her decision making skills. So she decides to poke the bear. It doesn't go over well. But, well, you can't do too much to end a relationship when no one's leaving the ship.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this has been delayed. I had a bit of scare-- turns out I am *seriously* allergic to sulfa based antibiotics... a fact that revealed itself after eight days. Long story short, I was at the hospital with a rash and minor tongue/throat swelling. Not fun, but I'm a-ok. Just a little, uh, off kilter.

I'm happy with the beginning, happy with the end... not sure about the middle bit. Might be edited in the coming days.

When she falls asleep that night, it's with great difficulty. Mindfang retreated without locking the door, which makes her a little uncomfortable, but locking the door herself doesn't seem right. Wouldn't that be like locking her Mistress out of her room? Or, locking her Mistress out of her own room? Oh dear it's too late in the evening

She falls asleep with her arms wrapped around Mindfang's pillow, wearing her robe. It's not the same as having her close by, but it's a decent compromise. It's weird sleeping without a body next to her, and it's even weirder to think that she's used to being cosseted by a slave owner after just a few weeks of captivity.

Despite her fitful emotions, her sleep is decent enough-- for once free from disquieting dreams. She's awoken from it far too early, however, by the sound of life on shore, namely the drunken catcalls of sailors stumbling home for the night.

Falling back to the current of dreams is impossible after that. Mostly because she ends up trying to puzzle out what they all mean and draws unsettling conclusions. She's awake and, for once, all too alive, her skin tingling and her eyes wide. The knowledge that she's anywhere near shore leads to conjecture about being turned in to local authorities or-- in this case-- fear that she'll be sold back to an abysmal slave market.

Thinking about sexual innuendo is, therefore, a rather welcome distraction, even if it it comes with certain dangers. She wants to be touched. She really wants to be touched. Rosa can't tell if it's a sexual or a platonic desire; she's keyed up to such a high after their... conversation that she's relatively sure if Mindfang had slept beside her she'd have thrown her morals to the wind.

She would have seriously regretted it in the morning, she's sure. She's not sure if she's ready for that, nor is she sure she should be thinking about it. The problem is-- she wants to think about it. Think about it a lot. Think about it until she can convince herself to throw caution to the wind and crawl
into her Mistress's bed stark naked and--

This isn't helping, Rosa, she scolds herself. Stop thinking about sex! You're not going to have sex! No! Bad! Think about the implications for your blood caste!. Which, well, aren't many since she's not entirely sure whether or not meaningless lovemaking would contribute to the death of her blood color. She was told many, many things during her time in the breeding caverns. Most of it has been proven to be categorically false.

Hrmrm. This may deserve more thought--

"Damnit." She mutters, rubbing anxiously at her face because all she can think about is Mindfang, Mindfang naked, Mindfang half dressed, Mindfang kissing her, Mindfang slowly undressing her--She lets out a soft scream of frustration and then presses her face into her pillow. Rosa flops over, hard enough that she can feel the frame of the bed through the mattress, then closes her eyes in determined pursuit of more sleep.

After an hour she gives up and stares up at the ceiling. This isn’t working. She isn’t going to fall asleep. She’s become used to sleeping with pair of arms around her, their owner often talking non-stop without noticing that their audience is half asleep. It's annoying, but also a wonderful deterrent to nightmares. Last night all she had was a cold, empty bed covered in expensive linens and the lingering scent of probably overpriced perfume. Not that Mindfang, as a blue blood, is ever particularly warm. But it's the principle of the thing.

Rosa lets out a sad sigh, a little angry at how tame she sounds even in her own head. She rolls onto her side, tucking the quilt beneath her chin. You're being ridiculous, she scolds herself, blowing a few strands of hair out of her eyes. The woman said she was fond of you, not that she wanted to marry you and buy you a house. Although, all things considered, she could probably find ample blackmail to earn both, and more, somewhere in the hundreds of journals just across the room. But she’s beginning to suspect that it’s rather impossible to blackmail Mindfang; mostly because she probably gives little to no fucks about what everyone else thinks.

But the point still remains—she doesn’t have a reason to believe that her Mistress’s affection for her extends beyond the average kindness someone might show to, say, their dog. You can be fond of your pets, after all. And just because she’s a sentient being, it doesn’t mean Mindfang sees her like that—

It doesn’t change the fact that she wants to go find where her Mistress is sleeping, crawl into bed next to her and kiss her senseless. Because she really wants to do it. Is self-actualization really worth the trouble? She doesn’t mind being a lesser being if it means the payoff is really great sex. Or does she? Ugh this is complicated. She doesn't even know if she wants Mindfang to like her as anything more than an amusing diversion. Mindfang being interested feels like an entirely different class of problem.

The fire has almost burned out and, with a sigh more suited to pondering matters of the afterlife instead of her romantic affairs, Rosa crawls out from beneath the covers. It’s no use, she’s not going to get any sleep tonight. She throws another log onto the fire, wincing as the weight of the wood only serves to extinguish what’s left of the flames. Of course. Is that a sign? Does this mean that if she tries to force their relationship along, the burgeoning flames of mutual affection will be suffocated? Or is she just sleep-deprived.

After several minutes spent pondering the mysteries of her life, she wanders onto deck in her dress and shawl, shivering as a dawn wind hits her face. Mindfang doesn't appear to be awake yet, probably because it's three in the morning, and no one is at the wheel because, well, they're not sailing. But there's a sailor up in the crow's nest-- but even he's half asleep.
There's a wooden ramp stretching from the ship's railing to the dock. She wanders over to it cautiously, staring out at the world beyond. It looks like a rather small town, not too grungy and rather well-kept in comparison to the harbor town she set sail from. It looks like an idyllic place to live, a few market vendors beginning to set up shop and a group of drunken sailors stumbling back to their ship. Nothing out of the ordinary, nothing remarkable—just a peaceful pastoral of dockside life.

Rosa leans against the railing and stares out at the town beyond. Her skin feels like it's crawling, as if a horde of spiders have been set lose beneath her clothes. It's not a pleasant feeling in the slightest, nor is the tightness gripping her chest and throat. She's anxious. Anxious without adequate reason.

She would like to say she doesn't know why. She would love to say she doesn't know why, play oblivious and pretend she's normal for once, pretend that she's just a woman without a job who just happens to be sleeping with a pirate queen and when they make port someplace else they'll walk off the ship, go back to their manor estate in the countryside where their dogs will greet them and-- well--

Rosa would like to pretend they're reckless and in love and that there's nothing wrong with that. She'd like to pretend that they'll one day find themselves happy beyond belief, equals in love and respect and-- and-- all of those things that come along with being in a relationship. All those things she imagines that would come along with a relationship, at least.

But she'll never be able to have that, not ever. Not as long as she remembers that Mindfang bought her. Even if she sets her free, even if she never mentions it again-- even if her Mistress prostrates herself at her feet and swears to be her eternal servant, she'll never forget that. She'll never be free.

Happy. She's happy. She's so happy, happy to know that the woman probably unconscious below decks in a hammock is "fond" of her, which means something more-- unless she's reading into it. But, well, after thinking on it for a night, she feels exactly the same way so she doesn't think she is. She's never felt like this before, so excited at the thought of being around another person, enthralled by the sound of their voice and the unique aroma of their perfume.

*Her* voice. *Her* perfume. The feel of her fingers against her spine, the press of her lips against her own, the warmth of her skin--

She's happy and she's afraid of it. Incredibly afraid of it. The last time she was happy, well, it came back to rip her heart out of her throat as her child was executed to set an example to an Empire. She doesn't even want to consider what the consequences for falling in love with her *Mistress* is. Probably losing a leg and having a piano dropped on her head.

Rosa lets out a groan and drops her head onto her folded hands. She counts to eight-- realizes what she's done and counts the last two digits to ten-- and then lifts her head. She stares up at the early sky and finds herself, for the first time she can recollect, wishing that she'd never held her child in her arms. She can tolerate losing him, she can tolerate crying every night over the memory of what she once had, but she can't tolerate anything taking the happiness of his presence.

She supposes she could if she had to. She could. Couldn't she? He'd hate to know he was denying her happiness. He was always trying to make her smile, her little boy with his effortless optimism and un-tarnishable ebullience. Go on, she urges herself, be happy! Be happy about the fact that this woman wants to cherish you.

But, no, of course she can't let herself be happy. She has to be overtaken by a feeling of dread stronger than anything else in the universe.

She should run. Run while no one is looking, run away from all of this and vanish. They'd take her
back at the birthing caverns, if she managed to find her way there without being caught. They won't allow the loss of a single member of her caste just because she'd, well, raised the child who'd almost overthrown the Empire.

Vanishing would be the perfect solution. Running off into the darkness to-- well-- um--

Do whatever it is runaway slaves do? What do runaway slaves do? What do actual slaves do, come to think of it?

She turns, sharply, at the sound of someone else's tread on deck. Mindfang steps out of Rosa's little cabin, hair tangled around her. She looks absolutely ridiculous. Rosa feels herself smiling without consciously meaning to. She tries to stop herself but, well, she can't. She just keeps smiling, smiling like an absolute fool.

"Good morning, Pet," Mindfang mumbles, wrapping her arms around her from behind. She squeezes her tightly and kisses the back of her neck, letting out a sleepy laugh when Rosa gasps and tries to pull away from the cold. "Couldn't sleep either?"

"No, Mistress," Rosa says, softly, trying to force herself to relax even as her brain screams to itself: 'what have you done, what have you done, what have you done' because she knows now that she's done something wrong. What if she's not in love with Mindfang? Did Mindfang consider that? Does Mindfang care? What does this all mean? Does it mean she'll be killed? Or does it mean she's doomed to pretend she's in love with her until Mindfang is bored of her?

She finds herself struggling to keep her breathing level, even as Mindfang stops nuzzling her neck and leans around to give her a concerned frown.

"What is it, darling?" She asks, stroking Rosa's hair off of her forehead in a gesture that's incredibly simple but still makes her shiver with appreciative pleasure. "Is everything alright? Did something happen--"

"No." Rosa says, a little more sharply than she needs to and Mindfang tenses a little, her ears flicking backwards in displeasure. "No," She says a little more softly, forcing a smile and taking a deep breath through her nose, "I'm fine, Mistress. I'm just a little... off-kilter from not sleeping."

"Mmm, well, I suppose we can give you permission to sleep in." Mindfang murmurs, relaxing a little and pulling her closer.

Rosa turns to kiss her. It's a gesture that seems correct more than feels right-- she doesn't want to kiss her, but, well, she does want to kiss her and--

And--

Oh god it feels amazing to kiss her. Incredibly amazing. Even without the tongue, which just seems to get in the way sometimes. The simple brush of lips against lips and the brush of cold fingertips against her cheek is enough to make her melt.

But is this what she wants? Is it? Is she sure? Is she completely sure? Oh god she has to be sure. And she is. She completely is. She's sure that this is what she wants. But is it love? Oh god she's going to be ill.

"I think it might be more appropriate if we took this inside, Mistress," she finally says, swallowing a little. Mindfang shifts back enough to give her an appraising stare, a frown forming between her eyebrows. "I'm cold?" She offers, feeling her body twitch a little from the tension. "And I'm sure we could find something better to do in the privacy of your cabin."
"...Of course, Pet." Mindfang says, letting out a sigh and kissing her once more. When she apparently feels they're done kissing, Mindfang escorts her back across the deck to her cabin. Once inside she collapses onto the bed, her arms extended.

Rosa gives her a nervous stare and lets out a cough. She's nervous. So nervous. Why is she so nervous? She can barely breathe past the sudden anxiety that Mindfang's company is creating. "Yes, Mistress?"

"Come here, Pet." She says, tiredly, rolling her eyes. "I want you in my lap so I can kiss you more."

"Oh."

"Yes, oh-- what is wrong with you this morning?" Mindfang looks more than a little bewildered, like a little girl who's woken up to realize she's dropped her teddy bear and now it's decided it would really be happier living in the woods rather than in a nice comfy house.

She wants to go over there and melt into her Mistress's arms. Rosa wants to absolutely collapse into her, cover her face with kisses and her body with caresses. She wants to curl up against her and do nothing but listen to the faint baseline of her heart and appreciate the differences in their skin temperatures, savoring the relative chill of her Mistress's skin while they cuddle beneath a feather duvet--

"Rosa. Pet." Mindfang sits up and glares. Rosa stares at her and lets out a confused whine. She crooks her fingers at her and lets out a huff.

Rosa takes a few hesitant steps over, then a few confident ones, and then, well, a few more confused steps until she's crawled into bed beside her Mistress. Mindfang wraps her arms around her and hauls her up until her lap, adjusting her like she's a ragdoll until they're perfectly notched together.

"...Are you sure you're alright?" She asks, her voice small. Rosa glances over at her and swallows. Oh god she looks so breakable. She can't say anything, now, she can't take back what she's said-- does she want to take back what she's said? No. No she doesn't, not at all. Well, maybe a little-- oh god.

"Of course, Mistress." She says, reaching up to twist a curl around her finger. This time her smile reaches her eyes. "I'm used to a good twelve to sixteen hours of sleep per night, you can't expect me to be so functional on zero."

That makes her laugh and Rosa decides, for the moment, to forget her anxiety and make out with the attractive woman copping a feel.

...That is the term, correct? It doesn't seem right--

"Just turn that stupid brain of yours off and think with your beautiful body instead." Mindfang breathes, her fangs pressing into her lips. "Kiss me instead of being so ridiculous."

So she does.

* * *

She kisses her until the pain in her heart comes back, kisses her until it becomes almost impossible to breathe past the tightness in her throat. When that happens she pushes Mindfang away and sits up suddenly, gasping for air.

Mindfang's at her side immediately and that makes it so much worse because she just needs a minute
"I think you need to have a bit of a rest, Pet," Mindfang says, rubbing her back in tiny little circles. "You kind of, uh, have crazy eyes."

"I think that might be wise, Mistress," She whispers, rubbing at her eyes. "I'm so sorry--"

"No apologies are necessary, Pet," Mindfang murmurs, stretching out onto the bed beside her. Rosa rolls over so her back is to her Mistress and, well, she feels bad but--

She can't look at her without panicking. So she pretends that Mindfang isn't there, presses her face into her pillow and tries not to shiver away from her touch.

* * *

Her anxiety is making Mindfang skittish. She knows it is, but she can't help it. She wants to curl up beside her, she wants to rest her head in her lap and allow herself to be read to but-- but-- she can't. She can't do it.

Over the next few days, doing anything with her makes Rosa panic. She's overthinking things, that's what she tells herself. You're overthinking this and no good will come of it. You were fine when you just kissed her constantly, why should it be at all different now that you've-- well--

Acknowledged you might be beginning to have feelings for her that go beyond the normal loyalty between Master and Slave.

Why should it be different? Why? What's the pressure now? She can't say but, well, she's beginning to suspect it has something to do with the fact that, now, she has something to lose. When they were nothing more than owner and possession, well, there's not much to lose.

But now? Now? They're friends. They're potentially lovers. And when--

She lets out a sharp groan that makes Mindfang glance up from her desk.

If, If, not when, things go wrong, she'll be crushed. Absolutely crushed. She doesn't want that, but, well--

"Pet, are you sure you don't require a doctor?"

"Yes, Mistress."

"...If you're not acting normal by tomorrow, I'm calling the local apothecary." That's not a threat, but Mindfang makes it sound like one. 'I know you're lying to me and I will call in a professional to prove it and then you'll look stupid and be very sorry when I exact my revenge' is probably the actual threat.

"There's no need, Mistress."

--Well, it's nice to have someone caring for her. Very nice to have someone caring for her. But she's not sick. She's scared. Incredibly scared. She can't do this again-- this whole giving someone else her whole heart, devoting herself to them body and soul just to have them ripped from her arms. Rosa feels ridiculous thinking in such vague terms when she knows that she's thinking of her son, when she knows that her only experience with loss is over his death--

Why can't she say it? Why can't she say that she's not ready to risk her heart being broken? That's
why she doesn't want Mindfang to care about her. She just watched her baby boy die a year ago; she's not ready for another risk.

She's scared and she doesn't know what to do about it.

"Can I get you a cup of tea at least?" Mindfang asks, curling around the back of her armchair and smiling anxiously. "I won't even spike it, Pirate's honor."

Rosa gives her a skeptical stare but can't help smiling a little bit. She's so earnest, so unabashed in her need to be... well, liked. "There's no need, Mistress, but thank you."

"You sure?" Mindfang murmurs, leaning down to kiss her. Rosa shies away and there's a moment of pure awkwardness that neither of them seems to know what to do with.

"Sit down and do your work, don't fret over me."

It's driving her insane, the crippling nervousness, the aching fear of doing something wrong keeping her from so much as smiling at her Mistress.

* * *

Mindfang is not happy. It's becoming obvious that she doesn't respond well to anything other than positive reinforcement. That's not exactly unexpected, but the sharp spike in possessiveness that follows it is.

She hasn't been outside of her Mistress's cabin in two days now. They're leaving port tomorrow afternoon and she's been inside for almost the entire time, with Mindfang hovering over her anxiously. Well, anxiously at first. Now it's become more than a little... aggressive.

"Tell me what's wrong," Mindfang murmurs into her ear, draped over her with her lips glued to her neck, breath tickling down her spine. "Did someone hurt you? Did someone say something?"

No, no, and no. She's not going to do that. She's going to sit here half-asleep and making contented noised until Mindfang gives up. It takes a full thirty minutes but she gives up eventually and with a grumble falls asleep-- head pillowed on Rosa's back.

She's unhappy. Rosa knows she's unhappy. She hasn't said it in so many words, but she's starting to mope and pout and sigh dramatically-- if it weren't over Rosa's attention she'd find it funny. It's a chain reaction of mental anguish and neither of them is particularly happy. Rosa can feel her anxiousness even in the middle of the night, with Mindfang unconscious beside her.

She slips out of Mindfang's embrace regrettfully, sad to lose her warmth. Her Mistress makes an anxious mewl and fidgets about between the sheets until Rosa slips a pillow beneath her head and covers her with the quilt.

She can't do this. She can't remain here night after night in a puddle of anxious pain. But she can't leave. She can't. She--

This is just going to turn into a dog chasing its tail if she doesn't shake herself out of it. Rosa huffs, pulling her shawl around her. She slips out of the cabin door as quietly as possible, guiding the door shut so she doesn't disturb the slumbering captain.

She stands at the ship’s railing once more, staring out into the town. What would it be like to be down there, now, snug in one of the little cottages? Would this be easier? Would it be easier to, well, avoid developing an affection? Or at least allow it to develop more… organically? She doesn’t
know. She’s never worried about it before, what she missed by growing up so separately. But now she’s… well… caught up in it.

Ugh. She needs to think away from all of this, calmly and collectedly. Without allowing herself to think about it, she takes the first few steps down the gangplank. By the time she begins to consider the idea that this might not be her best plan-- but she keeps walking.

Excuse her language but *fuck* it feels nice to have her feet on solid ground once more. She stands on the dock with her knees trembling like leaves in a rainforest laden down with the day's storms. Oh goodness does it feel nice to be on land. True ground is just a few yards away, down a long stretch of barnacle encrusted dock, wood that's dark and slightly slick with the spray of the sea.

As much as she wants to run, she can't. She *can't*. Not just because her conscience is screaming to her that it would, in all likelihood, break Mindfang's fragile little remainder of a heart into a million pieces-- well, that might be an exaggeration. It will make her sad if Rosa runs. And while it's an exaggeration that it might break Mindfang's heart, it will break Rosa's heart to run from the only person (still alive) in this world who still cares about her.

But, above all, she's too *scared* to do anything. She might feel an affection growing towards Mindfang but she's also still harboring a rather unquenchable terror about her. She's a powerful woman and--

Ugh. She turns to stare up at the Widow in all of her glory, polished wood gleaming and figurehead free of any grime. She can't quite make out what it's supposed to be, mind you, but it looks pretty. The masts rise up to the horizon so far she has to crane her neck to stare at them and, well, she feels a pang of pride to know that this has been her home for the past several weeks, this behemoth of the seas that raises as much fear in those who witness it as her illustrious Captain does.

Rosa can't run from this. She can't abandon it, she can't-- she can't let go of the little girl still fighting to stay alive, the little girl who wants to adventure all along the seven seas, scale the heights of adventure and the depths of despair in search of new stories to tell instead of just *read*.

And she wants to write her own story, too, a story that's more than just a mother in constant mourning for her dead son. She doesn't want to be remembered as the Dolorosa, the mourning on, the painful one, the sad one-- she wants to be remembered as-- well--

She doesn't know yet But she's getting there. Rosa lets out a sigh from the depths of her diaphragm and strides to the end of the pier, taking a seat on the edge and allowing her feet to dangle just above the water. She never thought she'd see the ocean, let alone be this close to it. If she wanted to, she could stretch out a toe just a half foot farther and feel cool water against her feet. She can taste the salt in the air, feel the sting of it in her eyes and the buildup in her hair.

Every breath she takes brings with it a sharp tang, a mixture of cold sea air and salty spray as waves hit the wooden posts of the dock. It's refreshing, in a way that makes her want to rest her head and go to sleep. Rosa leans against one of the posts that the Widow is tied to and closes her eyes. This is, well, this is more than she'd ever dreamed of, just being here.

Of course, she'd never dreamed she'd be owned by anyone, let alone a Pirate Queen and she never once considered the possibility of not *minding* that fact.

She falls asleep there, her brain frantically knitting and purling her thoughts into a tangled web of thoughts that make little to no sense and-- well--

It quickly becomes a nightmare.
When she wakes up, she's not sure what's happening but the skin at the back of her neck is crawling with fear. Oh lord how long has she been asleep? Five minutes? Five hours?

According to the shouting coming from the ship behind her, it's been longer than five minutes. That's, well, that's most definitely her Mistress. Her very angry Mistress. She wants to scramble to her feet but, well, she's tired and her body isn't processing things that quickly.

"--And I don't care how long it takes, Marcus, we're not going anywhere until we find her."

Marcus says something in reply that Rosa doesn't catch. Apparently Mindfang doesn't deign to respond because instead of shouted curse words she hears the exacting pound of boots on wood. Oh god she knows that sound, she knows that sound. Her heart starts to thrum like the wings of a bird set loose from its gilded cage. Oh god. What does she do, what does she do, what does she do--

Mindfang's feet make contact with the pier. Rosa flinches almost automatically and tries to call out, tries to let Mindfang know that she's right here and there's nothing to worry about. But her throat is rapidly going dry and-- well--

She manages to let out a croaking 'Mistress...?' that sounds pathetic even to her own ears. Mindfang tenses almost instantly and turns towards her, almost on a swivel. Mindfang doesn't pause to say a word, starting towards her with slow measured steps. Oh god. Oh god that's-- well-- that's-- well--terrifying.

Mindfang looks... 'furious' doesn't quite describe it: the incensed pallor of her skin, the incredible wideness of her eyes, the veins pulsing in her neck and the shaking of her hands as she menaces towards her.

Menacing. Yes, that's the word she wants. She's incredibly menacing. In her half-asleep yet sleep-deprived state she can't find the words to verbalize her panic and simply lets out a high pitched noise of fear that, in the wild, would be designed to scare off higher-caste predators with its ear-grating pitch. While some of the sailors flinch, Mindfang isn't deterred. The only other option, therefore, is to run away very quickly-- stupid option, stupid-- the more rational part of her mind mutters, even as she tries to scramble to her feet.

In a spectacular show of-- well-- something that's decidedly not a good example of only the prime hunters being allowed to remain in the gene pool (survival of the fittest? is that what the colloquialism is?) she only manages to... To--

Well she's not proud of it, but her insane scrambling simply sends her flying forward, tripping over herself before she stands. In short, she lands in the water with a spectacular splash.

Oh god is this what the ocean tastes like? She does not like this, not at all. Oh-- oh dear can she swim? Can she swim? No, she cannot.

She manages to get her head above water for a few seconds, however, enough to cough a little bit and start thanking the darkest gods.

That is, she surfaces for a few seconds before a wave washes up over her shoulders and sucks her under. She's not sure which one of them lets out the scream first, but, well, she thinks it might be Mindfang because she sure as hell can't breathe and what the hell is that grabbing her leg, what's grabbing her, is she going to die she doesn't want to die--

"FUCK. FUCK, FUCK, FUCK." Mindfang is screaming and then, all of a sudden, she's being
hauled out of the breakwater by an arm around her waist. Mindfang all but throws her onto the dock and she lies on her back, coughing up water and starting to cry.

Mindfang isn't amused. Her face is set in a taut expression and instead of saying a word she simply snaps, twice. Rosa stares, eyes wide, and climbs to her feet as slowly as possible, still dripping wet and coughing up saltwater. She wants to bawl and throw herself into Mindfang's arms like she's a small child because *damnit* this is not a good morning at all. Mindfang grabs her by the wrist and tugs, hard, all but dragging her back up the gangplank of the ship. No one says a word, not a single one of the sailors remarking upon the sight of a half-dressed Mindfang dashing about the ship dragging a soaking wet slave-- not even Marcus.

"Get inside." She hisses, shoving her towards the cabin door with far more force than is necessary. Rosa stumbles, catching herself on the doorframe with a nervous whimper. "Don't even try it," Mindfang snaps, shoving her inside, hard.

"I don't understand--"

"You left the ship."

"But--"

"*You left the ship.*" Mindfang shouts, baring both her fangs in a grotesque smile. "And I can't have that, now can I?"

"Mistress--" She whimpers, eyes wide with fear and, horribly enough, indignation. No, Rosa, indignation is bad. Indignation is what gets you killed in situations like these. "What are you--"

"YOU LEFT THE SHIP."

"YOU LEFT THE SHIP." She shouts, so loudly that Rosa cowers, half expecting her neck to be snapped. She intuitively tucks her chin close to her collarbone and raises her hands to ward off an attack.

Rosa sort of wants to punch her in the face. Sort of really wants to punch her in the face. Honestly, what is *wrong* with this woman? She hardly made it off the gangway-- she was sitting at the end of a pier for heaven's sake and *damn it all* she's not going to tolerate this. No one ever told her, in fact, that she wasn't allowed to leave the ship.

No one told her that she needed to stay on board, nor has she ever once been told that there's any sort of established boundary other than she shouldn't go below decks. It was just, well, sort of assumed that she'd know better. And clearly she didn't. But it's not as if she was caught in the middle of an escape attempt-- she was caught *half asleep* four yards away from the ship's gangway. She hopes Mindfang respects her enough to realize that even she's more intelligent than that.

And while she understands the logic behind her outburst-- well, the reaction seems a little extreme. You're allowed to be angry if you're disobeyed but like hell are you allowed to be angry when your unstated expectations aren't met. Rosa isn't the mind-reader here-- Mindfang is.

And she's not very happy about being expected to understand any of this without being told.

"I think we established that fact," She snarls, wrenching her wrist out of Mindfang's grasp and cradling it against her chest. If she had the ability to move her ears, she'd have pressed them flat against her head by now. She's frightened, incredibly frightened, but the fury rising within her stomach isn't going away. "And I think you need to stop *shouting.*"

"...Excuse me?"
"You can't spend an entire day treating me... like... like we're equals and insist on treating me like we're friends and then transition straight back to chaining me to the foot of the bed!"

"Rosa, Pet--" She starts to say, face, voice and posture incredibly menacing. When she snarls Rosa all but lunges for her, half rising off of the armchair she'd been thrown into. Mindfang shoves her back down, hard. "If you move again so help me god--"

"No. No. You can't do this to me. You cannot do this to me." She's starting to breathe a little more heavily, chest constricting. Mindfang's still snarling at her, teeth glinting in the light of the dawn. "You cannot-- you just-- you can't spend a week treating me like I'm your best friend and then wake up one morning and decide to chain me to your bed for walking off your damn ship."

"I should chain you to the bed for walking off this ship--"

"Fine then. Do it."

"Excuse me?"

"Chain me to your bed."

"I'm not going to-- Rosa-- do you honestly--"

"None of this is necessary, you know." Rosa says with a snarl, her voice incredibly distorted. "I wasn’t going to go anywhere. You know I wasn’t."

"It is." Mindfang mutters, her face still a mask of unadulterated fury. "It absolutely is. And if you ever so much as think about setting foot off board of this ship without me ever again I swear to god--"

"I'm not trying to run from you." She snaps, rubbing anxiously at her wrist where bruises are blossoming and a deep set pain is forming. "I can think for myself."

"Then why didn't you?" Mindfang mutters, and it's clearly the end of the conversation. "Clearly you weren't thinking at all when you thought it was a good idea to leave the fucking ship."

That should be the end of this conversation. Her Mistress is clearly overreacting and the only way to calm her down is going to be by being the bigger person and acquiescing to her ridiculousness and agreeing that yes, she screwed up. Then she should beg for forgiveness and pretend that nothing’s wrong.

But Rosa's not content, for once, to allow her the last word. Why should she allow herself to be treated like she's stupid? She's not stupid, she's subservient. She might as well be one of the sailors; the work she does on the ship is almost as important as what they do, after all. In some ways, she's even more important than them, but in a far worse position. Which sounds a little stupid but-- Well--

They don't depend on the whims of a woman prone to violent mood swings for their happiness. They don't wake up in the middle of the night praying fervently that the next day will bring relief from the stomach churning guilt of being alive, the pain of remembrance, the bone-gnawing uncertainty of what your life will be if you make a single misstep. Why doesn’t she think for herself? Because it's not worth it. Because she took enough of a risk to walk off of the ship to watch the sun rise and now she's put her life on the line.

She smooths her skirt over her knees and tries to swallow the venomous feelings in her chest. But the words are there, in her mouth, forcing her to shape her tongue and snarl. "Because. It's not my place to have my own thoughts."
The acrimonious intonation of her words couldn't be missed even if Mindfang wanted to be blind to it. Her heart is pounding, but for once, it's not with fear. It's with the sheer overwhelming sensation of rage that's overtaking her, filling up her windpipe and making her breath come in hard. Her face is heating up to a bright jade, she's sure, and her fingernails are digging into her palms so much she's beginning to drip blood on the carpet.

Mindfang simply snorts and rolls her eyes, tossing her hair over her shoulder. She stares at Rosa, though, eyes unusually sharp and her mouth curled up in a condescending smirk. "And, pray tell, Pet, who *said* it wasn't?"

"*You*, when you bought me and collared me."

"I took it off, didn't I?"

"Only because--" Rosa breaks off, her nostrils flaring.

Mindfang's showing her teeth now in a grotesque snarl that reveals her gums and widens her eyes to surreal proportions. It makes Rosa remember, for a fleeting moment, that she is a legendary Pirate, not a legendary pleasure sailor and she's probably killed more men than Rosa has children. It's an unsettling thought, but, well, all she can remember is the softness of her body pressed against her own while they lie in bed, the warmth of her voice, the affectionate flutter of her hands across the back of her neck while she tells stories in a voice so entrancing she might as well call herself a siren.

"--Only because you want me to like you."

"That's hardly fair. There's easier ways to go about that." Mindfang says with a forced sort of causality. She's looking anywhere but at Rosa's face and the wideness of her eyes is enough to make Rosa realize that, oh god, she's trying not to use her mind control against her and that should be enough to make her relent but it's not.

It's not, not right now when all she can think of is how unjust her life has been. How horrible every stage of her existence has been, aside from her childhood which was painfully idyllic given what was to come. Decades spent slaughtering newborns, decades spent hiding from the Empress with a child in her arms, countless tens of seconds spent screaming as he was executed before her eyes and now, it would seem, decades of slavery. It's not fair, it's not *fair* and the hatred it welling up in her like a waterfall pouring into a well. When she was finally beginning to think she might end up being happy —

And she's doing it to herself.

"You just want me here to make you feel like you're a good person." Rosa says, her voice full of all the anger she can give it. "And I hate to be the one to tell you, but being kind to a slave is hardly going to raise you on the moral ladder."

Mindfang isn't pretending she's not angry anymore. She's not forcing her face to be neutral or looking away and she's certainly not trying to hide how tense her body is, every inch of it poised to spring. She's turned her gaze on Rosa now and she can feel the numbing pressure building in the back of her head but *fuck that* she's had enough of being pushed around just because she's too broken to care. For once, for *once* she wants to feel worth something.

She forces Mindfang's presence from her head with an almighty effort, her body shaking. It's been years since she's done that-- fought against a psychic presence-- and she's certainly never come up against anything stronger than an blueblood a few days before maturation. But she finds it in herself, all the same. Mindfang looks like she's been punched in the stomach and Rosa hears her gasp.
"Don't you *dare*. Don't you even begin to think you can tell me that I need to think for myself and then try to make me think exactly what you want."

"It's not the same," She growls through gritted teeth, nearly lunging at Rosa when she lets out a strangled scream and flies up off the chair. She watches her pace around the coffee table with narrowed eyes, a lion in the jungle ready to strike when her prey is at its most susceptible.

"For fuck's sake you might have saved yourself the effort and bought a dog! Just! Really! Kill me know and buy a mastiff! It would be more than happy to keep you warm at night and god knows it would be more than happy to bite when you told it to."

"*Rosa*, you're trying my patience."

"Oh? Am I? Is it not my place?" She snaps and shows her teeth, crossing her arms over her chest. Mindfang rises, slowly, carefully. She straightens her coat around her and stares at the ceiling of the cabin, taking a deep breath in an obvious attempt to look like she's the calm one in this situation. The fact that she is the calm one doesn't make the Dolorosa any less belligerent.

"Don't test me, *Pet*, you're going to get hurt."

"Good! Prove my point! Because heaven knows it would be beneath you to beat your dog."

Yes, that's done it. Mindfang raises her arm to slap her and in a reaction born of years spend avoiding the worst of the Matron's blows down in the caverns, she grabs her hand and twists it back. It takes only the space of a heartbeat for Mindfang to lunge for her and they land on the coffee table with a deafening cracking of wood that wasn't built to handle the force of two fully grown trolls crashing down on top of it. Rosa's not the best fighter but she knows how to wound and the fighting quickly turns into a sloppy brawl, Mindfang's teeth digging into her shoulder and her nails digging deep into her Mistress's neck.

Hair is pulled, clothes are ripped and both of them are jabbed in the back by the fragments of lumber littering the expensive carpet. When Mindfang finally wrestles her to the floor she's still shrieking like a harpy, struggling to free herself. Mindfang doesn't say a word until the fight has momentarily gone out of her, forced to quiet itself when she runs out of energy. They both seem to know it's a transient state because Mindfang doesn't release her wrists from where they're trapped above her head, held tightly enough to bruise. Neither does she slip off of her perch on Rosa's hips, her knees digging into her ribcage.

Her chest is heaving, hard. She looks beautiful, this haggard, this angry. Rosa hates her for it, hates her with every inch of her soul.

"Let me go." She hisses out through gritted teeth. "Let me go right now."

Mindfang hisses. Rosa hisses back until Mindfang lets out a terrifying snarl. She falls silent without much more prompting because every troll knows what it means to hear a high blood growl. Two seconds from death, if you're not careful. Mindfang smirks, a wicked expression free from any sort of affection.

"Let's get one thing straight, *Pet."

Mindfang murmurs, still smirking at her but her eyes have gone dark and her body language is screaming for her blood. "I am in charge. And while I have no desire to hurt you, and get no joy out of hurting you, I will not allow insubordination. Not from you, and not from my men. And if you continue to behave like this, I won't have much of a choice."

"If you're going to kill me, you might as well do it now." She spits, her words coming out with sharp
enunciated tones she always resorts to when trying to win an argument. It works well on Mindfang because, of all things, she doesn't appreciate being condescended to whatsoever. It's a fleeting victory, but a victory all the same.

"Darling, I have more imagination than that." Mindfang purrs and then she's very deliberately pressing her body against Rosa's, hips grinding against hips and hands sliding down over her breasts to her waist. It's lewd in the worst way and Rosa snarls. The sound is cut short by Mindfang kissing her, hard enough to bruise.

Rosa bites at her lower lip as best she can and tries to lash out, fingernails raking bloody lines down her shoulders. Mindfang slams her into the deck of the ship incredibly hard, given the fact she's already sprawled on her back, and bites back. Rosa doesn't know which one of them gives in first; she's too caught up in her rage, the incredibly exhilarating feeling of fighting back and knowing that fuck the consequences at least she's alive.

When her heart finally settles long enough that she can pay attention to her surroundings, Mindfang's still looming above her pinning her to the floor. She looks worse for the wear, hair tangled and lips bleeding and a bruise forming on her left cheek. It's gratifying, actually.

"This is my ship. I am king, country, judge and jailor. I decide who lives and who dies. If I allow you to think you can challenge me--"

"For god's sake no wonder you're lonely. Do you expect everyone you care about to come to heel when you snap, no matter how they might feel?"

"..." Mindfang doesn't say a word. She looks as if she's been-- well-- shot-- the blood rushing from her face and leaving her the color of fresh ash. The expression of absolute devastation that washes over her face would be comical, just for the fact that it happens so incredibly quickly. She slips off of Rosa with the movements of a woman in shock and, as Rosa stumbles to her feet, still panting and bloody, Mindfang is out of the cabin door, slamming it behind her. The loud bang that follows is almost an afterthought but it's still jarring.

Rosa stares after her for a while before collapsing onto the floor with a groan, her face in her hands.

* * *

The door is definitely locked, fast. The lock turns but the knob doesn't and with a sinking feeling Rosa realizes that Mindfang must have busted the handle off. She's afraid. Incredibly afraid. Afraid for her life, afraid for her Mistress-- hell, afraid for everyone on the ship exposed to her temper.

I shouldn't have pushed her, she thinks with a sinking feeling in her chest. I shouldn't have pushed her that far. It wasn't necessary. Just because I needed the last word-- no. No. That was cruel, incredibly cruel. She trusted you, she scolds herself. She let her guard down and trusted you and this is what you do? Even if it was only a little, she still gave you that much.

The other half of her heart is still furious and begging for her to take action, to bust down the cabin door and seek out proper revenge. But at her age she knows better than to act without calming herself-- most of the time-- and it's obvious that any confrontation with Mindfang will only lead to one of them getting seriously... injured. Injured or killed, given what she just did and oh god what has she done.

She's going to be killed. She's never been so sure of that in her life, not even when the Imperial Guard broke down her first door and took them all into custody. She's going to be killed by the woman who bought her. It's not a noble way to die.
Rosa sniffs and realizes with increasing horror she's upset. Very upset. Upset at the idea of losing Mindfang's company. Upset that she picked a fight with Mindfang, upset that she started all of this-- upset that she-- she--

She's upset that she wants Mindfang to storm back in here and beat her senseless just to assuage her conscience. She's upset at herself for wanting to provoke her into doing that because-- dammit-- if Mindfang's still angry enough to beat her senseless that means she's not going to abandon her to die.

Oh god she doesn't like this, doesn't like this at all, doesn't like the idea of having to make her own decisions, of having to-- well-- take control of a situation for once--

Then she's bawling. Bawling on the floor of Mindfang's cabin, bawling over everything. Why did she pick a fight with her? Why? She lets out a choked cry and presses her face into her kneecaps.

Ugh. Ugh. Because she's nervous, because she's incredibly nervous-- because she's afraid to have Mindfang start treating her like they're lovers, afraid to be something more than a slave.

Because while she can handle being a spoilt pet, she's not sure if she can handle being a maltreated lover. She's not sure if--

Not sure--

Not sure if it's worth the risk. And that makes her feel absolutely heartbroken because, well, what kind of person does that make her? A terrible one. An absolutely terrible one. Shouldn't she be completely unafraid to love, completely unafraid to let herself be adored? But, nope. Nope. She's not that good of a person anymore. If she ever was.

She sits there on the floor for hours, curled up around herself until she hears the doorknob being replaced. It isn't Mindfang who opens the door, however, it's Marcus, leaning around the door with more caution than Rosa has ever seen him display.

"You, uh, alright in there?" He asks, frowning and scratching his head a little at the relative destruction spread out across the room. "No one, um, needs medical attention?"

"She's not here, Marcus," Rosa says, flatly. "And I'm fine."

"I, uh, know that. She's in her basement apartment--"

"Basement apartment?"

"Don't ask." He sighs, heavily, and rolls his eyes. "You want anything to eat? Drink, maybe? I mean, all of the high proof shit's in the corner over there but I can probably get you coffee or something."

"I think I'm fine, Marcus."

"Um. Okay. Well. Let me know. I, uh, I wouldn't recommend leaving this room for the foreseeable future." He says, a little ruefully, awkwardly rubbing the back of his head. "I, uh, don't think it would end well."

"Really?" She asks, her voice so harsh that he takes a few nervous steps back. Well, not nervous because he's easily three times her weight and he's also not an emaciated slave girl, so why should he be afraid of her? But he does step back enough to give her space to lash out without striking him.

"You don't say."
Marcus leaves her alone without needing much more prodding. Everyone, in fact, leaves her alone without much more prodding. Or any prodding at all. Mindfang doesn't reappear-- three days pass and she hasn't heard so much as a word from anyone about it. She doesn't leave the room, of course, but Marcus brings her food (she tries to take this as a good sign, but fails) but he doesn't seem inclined to answer any questions, so Rosa doesn't ask them. She knows Mindfang's alive, however, because she can hear her voice echoing about the ship as she barks orders at the crew in a voice that's far more brassy than usual.

She doesn't sound upset, based on the few sentences a day Rosa can make out through the walls. But she does sound a little too, well... jovial. Or perhaps she's reading into it? She's probably reading into it. There can't be any reason she would care-- other than, well, Rosa thought she was fond of her. It hurts her feelings to think the infatuation lasted less than a week.

Rosa's sleeping in a heap in the middle of Mindfang's bed when the door finally opens. She wakes up quickly, her heart pounding. Mindfang looks like hell, hair snarled in a mass of black curls that are begging to be brushed, gorgeous blue eyes rimmed in horrible shadows and face etched into a deep scowl.

"Please talk to me." She says, her voice cracking. Rosa reaches up nervously and begins to fidget with her throat, suddenly feeling a strange sort of pressure. Oh god no, no, no, no she doesn't want Mindfang to be upset with her, she doesn't want that. "Mistress, please I'm sorry--"

Mindfang ignores her, slamming through her desk with far more violence than is strictly necessary. Rosa sits up, hoping she looks pathetically forlorn in a sea of blue silk.

"Mistress don't do this, please," She begs, trying to untangle herself from a sea of blankets. When she only succeeds in half-strangling herself she quits. Unconsciously she begins to scratch at her wrists. "I didn't mean to upset you--"

She finds what she needs and stalks out of the room, boot heels leaving dents in the floorboards. The door slams loudly behind her and Rosa flinches, pulling the blankets around her. Oh no, oh goodness no this isn't what she wanted-- this isn't what she wanted at all.

This is worse than anything she'd imagined in her panic-induced insomnia. So much worse. She might not have been ready to crawl into bed each night and say "I love you" but she's not quite ready to demote herself to all-alone status.

Rosa feels... absolutely desolate. This, she whines to herself, crawling under the duvet once more, is not how romance is meant to be.

* * *

Considering that things can't get much worse, Rosa subsequently feels capable of taking her chances and leaving the cabin. At best, Mindfang will come over, start yelling and be forced, by extension, to talk to her. At worst, Mindfang will... well, Rosa doesn't know. Something scary. But instead of anger or shouting, Mindfang just starts avoiding her. It's remarkable how good she is at it. She spies the door to her cabin opening and like magic she vanishes below decks.

Rosa wonders where she's been sleeping. It hasn't been in their bed. She hates that she's thinking of it as 'their' bed now, instead of her Mistress's bed, because it's not their bed, is it? She's Mindfang's, the bed is Mindfang's-- everything in sight is Mindfang's.
But she misses her-- a lot. She wants a pair of arms twined around her, warm and holding her close, and she wants someone to look after her. It's lonely without her Mistress's company, lonely without her conversation or even her grumpiness. She'd prefer to be bossed around more than ignored.

It's horrible. Rosa tries cornering her, in the galley, in the few seconds in the mornings when she steals inside her cabin for clothes, but, well, the woman is almost invisible. It's as if she can manipulate the light around her to cloak herself in total darkness. In the room silently, out of the room silently, moving through the night like a rouge shadow.

It's no use. It's absolutely no use trying to talk to her, even when she sits on an armchair and stares with her best pout. A niggling thought in the back of her brain screams at her that, damnitall, if she just starts crying Mindfang will pay attention to her but, well, that's low, very low.

So she prays that Mindfang will forgive her soon enough. Forgive her or lose her temper-- one of the two. She'll either be cuddled or beaten but either way it's attention. That doesn't happen though and she spends a good three days more without saying a word to her Mistress. Almost a week has gone by since the argument actually occurred, but Rosa's still kicking herself.

It gets to the point that she throws on the most attractive of her borrowed dresses, wraps her shawl around her and stands out on the deck, glowering. Mindfang notices her almost immediately and shoots her a nasty glare from the bridge.

She stands there for two hours before Mindfang leaves the bridge, taking the stares with footfalls that are a little too firm. She doesn't acknowledge Rosa as she's stalked across the deck and down into the hold.

When she turns to shoot Rosa a nasty comment about being below decks, her mouth opens but snaps shut. She glares instead, and points back up the stairs.

Rosa stares, blank-eyed, until Mindfang snarls and throws her hands into the air in surrender. Rosa follows her deeper and deeper into the bowels of the ship until they're standing in the very basement, and-- well--

"I miss you." She mumbles, standing in the doorway to the hold. "Won't you talk to me?"

Mindfang looks over her shoulder and for a split second she scowls. But the longer she looks at her the more she relents until she sighs and mutters:

"Fine. What do you want?"

"...I'm sorry that I hurt you. I didn't mean to-- well-- be cruel. But I was--"

"No shit."

"There's hardly call for that sort of language." Rosa murmurs, as preposterously as she can.

Mindfang cracks a smile but doesn't look her in the eyes. "I-- I was out of line. And I apologize, Mistress."

Mindfang lets out a strangled groan, closing her eyes and dropping her head back. Rosa takes this as a sign that the conversation is going to continue and steps past her into the hold. She brushes against Mindfang ever so slightly and they both jolt a little at the physical contact.

The hold is, well... unremarkable. Really unremarkable. She can barely see beyond what's directly before her; the light from the lantern held at Mindfang's side is just bright enough to keep her eyes from adjusting. Mindfang lets out a grunt of disapproval but shuts the door to the hold and locks it.
They stand in awkward silence, the sloshing of the ocean around them echoing from outside the sturdy wood of the ship.

"...You were right, though." Mindfang says, letting out a sigh. She's screwed her eyes up tight and is frowning at the floor.

Rosa wants to snark back at her but, well, she is apologizing. "Regardless. My... behavior and words to you were unacceptable. And I regret that."

"Yeah, well... That doesn't make you any less right." Mindfang steps past her into the darkness of the hold, raising her lantern high.

There's only a few foot swathe of light shed, but it's enough to make Rosa raise an eyebrow. She's not sure what she thought she'd see, but the hodgepodge of items before her isn't it. There's pallets of non-perishables piled up, barrels of water and bottles of rum. But there's also chests, tightly sealed, and bags that jingle when Mindfang steps over them. Despite her survival instincts screaming for her not to, she follows her into the darkness. As they walk, more and more obscure items come into focus, pieces of furniture that are inlaid with gemstones and pearls as well as objects d' arte all over--paintings, statues, carvings--

"Are we in an art gallery or a pirate ship?" Rosa asks, laughing a little. Mindfang gives her a glare that is decidedly un-amused. Not an appropriate subject change? She thinks it is. A little less serious.

She loves art. Loves it. Loves the color, the shapes, the visions of places she's never seen. As a little girl she spent days pouring over books of illustrations, painstakingly attempting to remake the beautiful images she saw on the pages before her. Her attempts were usually less than remarkable, but her lusus had fawned over them all the same. It brings back memories, so musty she can almost smell stale lavender and feel dust in her nostrils. A feeling of nostalgia, strong as a typhoon, sweeps over her and she suddenly wishes Mindfang wasn't upset with her, the she hadn't picked a fight so she could crawl into bed beside her and let herself be cosseted.

Suddenly, what she wouldn't give to have a home, a place to call a sanctuary is shocking. A place that's bright and sunlit, with colors on the walls and a fire in a hearth and comfort all around.

"I like art." Rosa murmurs, trailing her fingers over an ornate frame surrounding a landscape painting. "I like colorful art. When I was a child--"

"I'm trying to apologize and you're not letting me," Mindfang cuts her off without preamble and Rosa wants to be taken aback but, well, it's okay. She was rather expecting that, after all.

"Why? What for. I'm nothing more than property. You could leave me down here with your paintings and no one would remark on it." She says, as cheerfully and pleasantly as possible.

Mindfang stops in her tracks and turns sharply on her heel. "Would you stop saying that." She snarls, showing both her fangs. Rosa doesn't so much as blink.

"I think we're not going to get any further in our relationship until we acknowledge the fact that you quite literally hold my pedigree in your hands."

"Okay, fine! I bought you! I own you! What do I have to do to make that okay?"

"Nothing." She shrugs, trailing her hand over the crystal fringe on the shade of an ornate lamp. The jingling rings out far too cheerfully but she likes the sound either way. "It's fine."

"No, it's not fine. I don't-- I don't like it! But-- God damnit Rosa if the only way I can know I can
Keep you is to put a collar around your neck and chain you to my bed, I will."

"Then why haven't you?"

"Because you don't deserve that. You're-- you're better than that."

"So is every slave you'll ever own. And every slave that has been owned."

"Half of the men on my ship are slaves who bought their freedom. There's no man more reliable than one who 's had to work to call themself free. It's not a matter of respect."

Mindfang sinks down into a chair behind a desk. Rosa almost laughs because-- now that she's looking, the little clearing has been arranged in an almost exact replication of her workspace above deck, down to the bookshelves which are, of course, full of more journals.

"Do you respect me?"

"Rosa, can we stop playing this game." Mindfang gives her a dismissive huff and braces her elbows against the desktop. "You raised one of our generation's most remarkable men and hid from the Empire for a good 33 years. That takes... well, it takes a hell of a lot of guts, not to mention skill and drive and determination. And-- I'll be damned if I don't respect that."

"Can we-- Can we not talk about that." Rosa says, her voice cracking. She takes a seat on a trunk, pressing her head to her knees and taking a deep, difficult breath.

"About what?"

"Him."

"Okay. We won't." Mindfang shrugs, rubbing at the bridge of her nose. "I. Um-- Well, the point is, I respect you."

"The feeling is mutual."

"So. I--" She breathes out through her nose. "I don't know what to do. I like you."

"...So I gathered."

"I mean. I like you in a way that I didn't really... well, In a way that I didn't expect." Mindfang snaps a pen in her hands and they make eye contact. She gives Rosa a tight, restrained smile and in the flickering light of the lantern she makes out a faint series of cerulean smudges forming along her face. Rosa stares, and feels her throat go dry. She sinks down onto the edge of the nearest trunk.

Her heart is skipping beats every time her brain tries to process what this means, what she's supposed to do about this-- but-- well-- does she have to do something about it? Oh fuck all.

"Oh." She finally says, reaching up to rub at her cheeks to hide her own blush.

"Yeah, oh. And it makes me uncomfortable because-- I want a relationship. I want you to wake up next to me and not wonder if you'd be with me if you had a choice."

Mindfang looks decidedly uncomfortable and gives Rosa a plaintive stare. Rosa blinks back, refusing to acknowledge her plea for help. As far as she's concerned, Mindfang can keep talking.

"--And I want to... well, I want to know that... you like me because you want to. Not because, I, um, made you. Which. You know. I could."
"If I refuse to consent to a relationship with you, will you?"

"Will I what?"

"Make me."

"...No."

"Could you?"

Mindfang looks away, her face coloring slightly. She's clearly ashamed of the answer she's going to give and Rosa's chest tightens. "Honestly. I-- I need to know."

"I don't want to tell you."

"Please."

"I could make you love me so much you'd never stop thinking about me and I could make you wait for me every second of every day to kiss you. I could make you forget that you were ever afraid of me and I could do it so subtly and so slowly you'd never doubt for a second that it wasn't your idea in the first place. And even if you did, well, it's not like I'd let you remember that."

"...Have you?"

"See? See? This is why I didn't want to--"

"You're acting like a child. I'm taking you at your word. I'm asking if you've done it in the past."

"I've tried." Two words. Three, if you want to be pedantic and expand the contraction. So much is said in them, as short as they are. They're spoken with the finality of a curtain being dropped onto a stage floor, a bleak finish to a depressing tragedy. They don't invite inquiry, and Rosa isn't inclined to give it.

"That's a shame." Rosa says with a sad smile, crossing behind the desk. She bends her head down low, pressing her lips to Mindfang's forehead. "You don't need to resort to that."

"I-- I just get scared. I get really scared and then I worry that they're going to leave me and I start-- I start turning into a paranoid freak but I can't stop myself and-- and-- I don't want to drive you away too. And if I own you, you can't leave me. You can't leave me if you depend on me and then I don't have to-- I don't have to break your mind."

"You don't know how to handle yourself, do you?"

"No. I'm a fuck up and I always will be."

"I never said that. I-- I just think there's a better way to handle your trust issues then to break your way into people's minds."

"...You're weird. Really weird. Aren't you scared of me?"

"A little. But I was before." Rosa slips into her lap with a heady sigh. Mindfang is taken aback, her eyes going a little wide before she lets out a pathetic whimper and presses her face to Rosa's neck. "I... I need you to understand how difficult it is for me to be put in this position, Mistress." She says, softly, running her hands through her hair. Mindfang whines and the sound tugs on her heartstrings like a harpist. "No. No, don't pout. You're not a little girl."
Mindfang stops whining, and lifts her head. She's crying a little and Rosa sighs, using the hem of her shawl to wipe her eyes.

"You've put me in a horrible position. I hope you know that."

Mindfang shrugs, and reaches out to anxiously fidget with the knob on the lantern, making the flame go higher and then lower. Rosa watches the shadows alight on the walls, staring as a grandfather clock inlaid with gems glows gleams and then vanishes.

Rosa sighs, heavily. They're both so afraid. Alone and afraid and it's pathetic that two grown women can't be mature enough to sit down and talk out their differences. Well, it's not for a lack of trying.

"Do you want me to serve you or love you? Because you can't have both. God knows you can't have both. You can ask me to be obedient but not without asking me to fear you, and if you want me to love you, you can't-- you can't think that you can just have me be happy with you all the time."

"...If you loved me you'd be happy all the time." She says and her voice cracks and Rosa's heart fissures a little along with it. She's so broken, so broken the poor dove. She's been patched up well enough but god knows what has to happen to a person to make them so afraid, so scared that no one will want them.

"No. Not at all. Sometimes people get angry when they worry, or they get sad when they fight-- you must know that."

"If you really cared about me you wouldn't have gotten so angry with me." Mindfang mumbles, frowning. She's fidgeting anxiously with the fringe of Rosa's shawl and the only thing that keeps Rosa from slapping her is when she looks up from her hands with a face that's so sad it's impossible not to relent.

"No," She murmurs, reaching out and tucking her hair behind her ear. Mindfang leans into the touch with a pout, eyes going steadily more blue around the edges. "No, darling, that's not how it works. If I don't care about you enough to get angry, that's when you should be concerned. I-- I just-- you can't expect me to not have reservations about allowing myself to be emotionally vulnerable to you."

"Why not?"

"Because my fate is tied to your whims. If you want to kill me, you can and no one will bat an eyelash."

"I won't." She mumbles, frowning and reaching to wrap her arms around Rosa. She tenses up but allows herself relax, letting Mindfang cling to her. "I won't kill you."

"Even so... I think, for now, it would be best if we allowed things to remain status quo."

"I--"

"It's what I'm asking of you. I think it's best... for my peace of mind and yours if we put the collar back on."

"...Why yours?"

"Because it makes me feel safe to know... to know I'm stable. Even if it means losing my freedom," Rosa murmurs, feeling more and more disgusted with herself as she speaks. "I-- I don't feel like I'm going to get abandoned or hurt if you own me."
"We are so fucked up."

"I was a single mother who watched her son be executed and is wanted for treason. What's your excuse?"

Mindfang smiles at her, a genuine smile. "I never had you to look after me before."

"I'm not flirting with you until you've put a collar back around my throat." Rosa mutters, rolling her eyes. Mindfang looks a little tense around the eyes and jaw but slides Rosa out of her lap. Rosa steals her seat without any preamble.

Is she wrong? Is she wrong to feel that it's acceptable to be enslaved? It's not acceptable, she knows that. She knows that more than anything. She knows that-- well-- she should be gratified that Mindfang wants to free her. To set her at total liberty. But a nagging voice at the back of her head is saying, with horrified paranoia, that this is just a ploy for her affection that this is just--

Mindfang opens one of the chests and begins to fumble through it. She seems to find exactly what she needs, or knows exactly what she's looking for because Rosa soon hears a happy hum.

"Is this acceptable, Miss High and Mighty?" Mindfang says with a devil may care smirk that's horrifically reassuring. She perches on the edge of her desk, swinging her legs over the desktop.

Rosa raises her eyebrows. "I'm horrified you'd accuse me of such improprieties, Mistress."

"Yeah, well," She shrugs and, then to Rosa's horror, she's dangling a bejeweled monstrosity in her face.

It's got a plethora of what looks like diamonds, ornate gold filigree that looks almost like lace and, horrifically enough, an emerald as big as a quail egg. The only sense in which it's a collar is the fact that it seems short; short enough that when it's fastened she'll probably feel it.

"I am not wearing that."

Mindfang looks victorious. Absolutely victorious. She's grinning so widely Rosa can almost forget that she was crying in her arms just a few minutes before.

"Might have thrown the other one overboard in a fit of pique. You'll have to make do with this until I, you know, find the nearest pet store."

"...Going a little too far." Rosa mutters, still giving the necklace a baleful glare.

"I don't know where the fuck else you buy collars. I mean. Fuck that." Mindfang rolls her eyes. "Are you going to be angry with me when I make you heel, now?"

"No." Rosa wrinkles her nose and drops her chin onto Mindfang's knees. Oh god she's terrible. Just terrible. Now that she's getting collared again and had demoted herself to slave girl, she's perfectly happy again. Why is that? She doesn't want to question it. So she ignores the queasy feeling in her stomach and lets out a sigh. "Well. Only a little."

"Yeah, well, then I reserve the right to... Ugh I don't even know, I just-- I'll do what I need to keep you."

"Regardless, I'm not wearing that." Rosa repeats, narrowing her eyes when Mindfang jangles the necklace before her face once more. "It's hideous."

Rosa rolls her eyes and frowns, but bows her head all the same. Mindfang's hands close around her neck but just as the necklace touches her skin Mindfang draws back.

"I can't do this. I can't."

"Fine then." She says, lifting her head and raising her eyebrows. She leans back in Mindfang's chair as if she owns it, and crosses her legs. Mindfang gives her a smile that's so fond Rosa's heart swells and she lets out an unnecessary squeak.

"Fine then," She repeats, swallowing heavily. "It's either you stick a collar on me or you brand me."

"...No. No I refuse to do that. That's-- That's absolutely disgusting." Mindfang draws her face back into an expression of abject horror, her body recoiling in on itself like a startled cat. "No. No I'll-- I'll find you a better collar. And fuck don't ever say anything like that again, I feel absolutely sick to my stomach--"

Her reaction is startling, especially when she grabs her by the chin and yanks her face close. "--And you will never allow anyone to mark that gorgeous skin of yours so help me god."

"I-- I, um, I'm not planning on it, Mistress."

"Good," Mindfang grumbles, still scowling. "Don't even joke about that, it makes me-- URGH."

"...I take it that means I'm getting a collar?"

"Yes. But not until we make port further south and I get you some decent clothing." Mindfang lets out a heavy sigh and runs her hands through Rosa's hair. "In the meantime, Pet, you need a bath."

"...Come with me?" She asks, letting out a pathetic sigh. "In a show of good faith that you're not holding a grudge."

"Okay, Sweetheart, I can't tell if you're offering to share a bath with me or watch you take a bath or be the one to scrub you off."

"...Is there one option that's more preferable than the others?" Rosa says as archly as possible, doing her best to preen. It's difficult to do so when she doesn't know how to, but she imitates Mindfang's swagger as best as she can and, apparently, it works because Mindfang lets out a happy moan and swings her feet back and forth eagerly.

"Are you flirting with me?" She asks, coyly, giving Rosa a smile that only curls up in one corner of her mouth.

"Yes, Mistress, I do believe I am."

Mindfang reaches towards her, wrapping her hands around Rosa's waist and tugging at her insistently. Her hands are freezing but Rosa doesn't shiver or push her away. Well, she does shiver, but not from the cold. "I... I think I'd like to be in the bath with you, if that's an option."

"It could be." Rosa murmurs, standing slowly and pressing herself against Mindfang slowly, inch by inch until their shoulders are brushing and their faces are only ever-so-slightly apart. "It depends on how nicely you ask, however."
Mindfang drops her head back and lets out a chuckle that turns into a moan when Rosa presses her lips to Mindfang's exposed neck and lingers. This is nice, this is very nice, being in charge. Well, not in charge but-- well-- on top? Is that the phrase? She should ask. Ask when they're not about to start making out in a bathtub or whatever, because bringing up sex when they're both naked will lead to places she's not sure she's quite ready to visit. But the promise of it happening one day in the future, is perhaps, good enough for Mindfang, because she very quickly shoos Rosa away from her neck and begins to kiss her in earnest. She hooks a leg around her hips and pulls her in close, arms sliding around her shoulders. Rosa still isn't very sure what to do in moments like these, but she tries her best to keep up, leaning into the kiss and letting herself, for once, remembering nothing save the feel of her Mistress's lips against her own, the electric brush of tongue against tongue. It feels good to-- to-- well, not worry about things.

Not worry for once about dead children or fallen dreams or the crushed state of her soul. Feels amazing, actually, not to have to think of any of that whatsoever and simply lie back and let Mindfang take care of her. It's just easier of she submits, degrades herself to slavery and never has to worry about whether or not her lover will abandon her because when you've invested so much money in a single person you aren't about to abandon them over a spat. She's being selfish, she knows that. Incredibly selfish. Selfish and immature but she's so afraid, so afraid to be alone again, so afraid to wake up one morning no one in the world would care if she lived or died.

It's less painful for her, this way. Mindfang might be afraid for Rosa to leave her, but that fear is something born of insecurity, a lack of confidence in her-- and it's valid. Anyone in her situation, romantically pursuing a slave, would feel the same way she supposes, as a hand brushes the back of her neck and makes her moan into the kiss. She doesn't know the desolation of knowing everyone you love is dead. That's heartbreak. That's heartbreak you never, ever begin to comprehend.

So she ignores that too, ignores the flutter of grief that wrenches its way onto her heart, and the sharp stab of nausea that rises whenever she remember that she's a broken figure, an orphaned mother. It's easy to do, after all, when she's pressed against Mindfang. She starts to kiss her back with a frenzied desperation that seems to shock them both, Mindfang's hands tightening around her shoulders in an effort to remain balanced. But she doesn't shove Rosa away or demand for her to let up, simply allows her take the lead once more. It's a lot easier to kiss her now that she knows what to listen for, the soft fluttery moans that she makes when Rosa does something right, and the twitching of her fingers when she wants her to try something again.

"You're getting the hang of this," Mindfang pants against her shoulder when they finally break apart. Rosa sniffs haughtily and feels a flush of pride spreading up her neck. "I had a good teacher."

"Mmmm yep, you're really getting the hang of this," She mutters, her body shaking with suppressed laughter. Rosa's the one to crack first, letting out a giggle followed by another giggle until she's collapsed into the desk chair laughing so hard her ribs are seizing up. Mindfang simply slips to the floor, her body shaking with silent chuckles.

"Fuck are we weirdoes." She finally manages to gasp, still smiling like the sun has come out for the first time in days and she's longing to hold a picnic. "God, I feel terrible now."

"Why?"

"Because. Because you're so fucking pure it doesn't seem right to corrupt you."

"Don't think of it as corruption so much as... the imparting of knowledge useful to becoming a fully actualized individual outside the constraints of traditionally mandated norms." Rosa murmurs and her breath rushes down the back of Mindfang’s neck.
She drops her head back, staring at the ceiling. A hand makes its way around the back of her neck and their lips touch once more, lightly. "...Sure, I can go with that."

They remain curled up together in silence for a good half-hour, kissing lazily and making occasional happy noises. Rosa's delighted to know that this, out of everything in the past few days, feels right, comfortable and perfect and absolutely lovely.

Mindfang is the one to break the silence. "Rosa, Pet?"

"Yes, Mistress." She responds, raising an eyebrow.

"Don't ever try to leave me again." She says, voice soft and mellow, as if she's asking what they're going to have for dinner. The threat is implicit and Rosa feels a shiver meander down her spine. "I won't tolerate it."

"...I understand Mistress."

And just like that, things are back to normal. She rests her head beneath Mindfang's chin, eyes drifting shut. Mindfang traces the line of angry red skin around her neck where her collar normally rests. Yes, she's sure about this. She may not know where her ship is bound, but it's left the harbor and she'll be damned if she's not on board. Owned by a pirate or not, she's alive and that has to count for something.
Mindfang wakes her up by pouncing. Literally pouncing, diving onto the bed and crashing on top of her. Rosa wakes up with a terrified shriek, flailing frantically in an attempt to scratch her Mistress's eyes out. Mindfang, clearly not anticipating a violent reaction, has no hope of protecting herself. Rosa has her pinned to the mattress with ease and snarls, darkly.

It takes her some time to realize what's happening. Mindfang's lying beneath her with her eyes incredibly wide. Rosa see her pulse pounding in her throat.

"Um. Good morning?" Rosa says, awkwardly, her voice cracking with the sudden fear that she may, in fact, be about to die. Mindfang, sensing that the moment of danger has passed, rolls her eyes and huffs. "Pet, you're either going to kill me or rip my clothes off and fuck me senseless. You don't have any other options. Pick."

Rosa glares, sleepily, beneath her blush. Being attacked then sexually harassed is not her idea of a pleasant wake up call. She crawls off Mindfang to hibernate beneath the duvet once more. She's asleep before Mindfang recovers and this time, she's shaken awake gently with fingers running through her hair and a pair of lips pressing to her temple.
That's better, she thinks with a smile. She nuzzles into her touch, ignoring Mindfang's smug chuckling, not fighting back when she's roughly tugged into Mindfang's lap and cosseted.

"Sorry, Pet." She mumbles into Rosa's ear, waltzing her fingertips up and down her spine in a way that makes her shiver unabashedly. "Didn't think that one through. Forgive me?"

After the way the previous night ended, Rosa's surprised Mindfang is requesting clemency. She lets out a hum of deliberation before dropping her head back and exposing her neck.

Mindfang takes a sharp breath. Good, Rosa got that right. She was rather sure that was the proper sign of submission and when her Mistress leans in and kisses her throat the sharp pricking of teeth confirms it.

"Good girl." She purrs, easing Rosa back onto the mattress.

Things still feel horribly tense from yesterday's spat. Rosa's not wearing the necklace, but she's still inclined to do much more than kneel at Mindfang's feet and beg her forgiveness. But Mindfang appears to be far less inclined to hold a grudge now that they've talked-- or, at least, less inclined to hold a violent grudge. They'd gone to bed separately, but only because Mindfang had 'business' to tend to and wanted Rosa to get some proper rest. Both of them had avoided acknowledging the fact that Rosa had spent at least an hour crying in Mindfang's arms from sheer relief while Mindfang spent the entire time awkwardly trying to absent herself from giving comfort.

Mindfang, it turns out, is not at ease dealing with crying women. She'd done her best to end the encounter, first by promising Rosa about two hundred different things before realizing it wasn't working and then taking a more duplicitous route. Her Mistress may be uncomfortable when Rosa cries, but Rosa doesn't like threats about being chained to the bed and kissed senseless. The kissing part she's sure she could adapt to but if she's going to be kissed she'd prefer to submit to it without shackles around her feet.

This morning it appears that Mindfang's studiously trying to pretend nothing happened last night. Or the night before. Or the night before. Pretending that things are normal, not weird, not stressful and definitely not awkward. Rosa agrees with the tactic. There isn't anything else that can be said.

"Come on, Pet, let's get you dressed." Mindfang says, finally, deciding she's kissed Rosa enough for the time being. "We've got an extra few days docked-- one of my men managed to get himself a three day stint in the local jail for public intoxication and I'm going to make the most of it."

"Are we going somewhere?" Rosa asks, cautiously, wanting to point out that she is, in fact, a wanted woman and superfluous expeditions may not be wise.

"We're going to get you some decent clothes so you can finally stop stealing mine." She says with a flirtatious smirk. "I'm in the mood to spoil you, darling, appreciate it."

"I believe the saying is 'there's no such thing as a free lunch'."

"Mmmm yes, I suppose not." She shrugs, finding a dress and a pair of tights in the back of her closet, all items that don't quite suit Rosa's taste or body. Mindfang throws it all onto the bed, not apologizing when one of the shoes almost hits Rosa in the face. "But I also suppose I'll be able to find a way for you to... make it up to me."

Her voice is like velvet, husky and warm and almost remarkably smooth against her ears. Rosa feels a tremor run down her spine and does her best not to blush. Nope, not going to encourage her. She manages not to, by some strange miracle, and sits up a little straighter in order to glance over
Mindfang's wardrobe offerings.

"Isn't this a little... formal?" She murmurs, raising her eyebrows along with the garment. It's a heavy dress, made from what looks like black satin. It has a modest square neckline and what looks to be a rather flourishing skirt. She runs a hand over the fabric and its soft and perfect and everything she's come to expect Mindfang to wear. It's also, well, quite unsuited for someone in her position.

Mindfang simply shrugs, making a hand gesture that implies 'whaaaaaaaaaatever' without saying it. She still says it. "Who cares. Put it on and let's go."

She dresses as quickly as she can, anxiously submitting herself to the indignity of having Mindfang help her when she discovers that the back of the dress is, in fact, secured by an impressive amount of buttons. She has the distasteful realization that she submitted to slavery more complacently than she's submitted to being dressed. Mentally, at least. No doubt the fingerless trolls who made the mistake of trying to purchase her would disagree with the qualifier 'complacently'.

A nagging, seditious voice in the corner of her mind scoffs something about her entire life having been nothing more than glorified slavery, a sentiment that she's found herself agreeing with more and more as she passes her days with Mindfang. Living as a woman's pet shouldn't be more pleasant than tending the mother grub. Either her job sucked or Mindfang is a terrible slave owner. Rosa's aware Mindfang can be quite savage when roused to it, however, so she dismisses her doubts for the time being.

It takes Mindfang a horrifying ten minutes to locate a comb when Rosa asks for one. "How do you not know where your comb is? Or a brush, even?" The comb is located between the cushions of the couch, on the end nearest the fire. Mindfang sniffs, dismissively, and mutters darkly. "It's not like I have to look pretty while I'm working, you know. We're pirates, Rosa."

Rosa sighs and gives her a withering stare before quickly arranging her hair, taking only a few moments to make herself look presentable and Mindfang watches her curiously.

"You're so persnickety for someone with such short hair," Mindfang mutters in response to her arched eyebrows. "My hair goes past my waist and I haven't brushed it in, like, weeks."

"That's disturbing on several different levels." Rosa mutters and Mindfang shows her fangs, playfully. Or, well, in a manner that seems more playful than threatening. It's hard know what she intends when her body language, in general, screams 'tense!' and 'awkward!!!!'. They're both avoiding the issue, and do it admirably.

"No sass from you. You're still in trouble, remember? Don't tempt me to beat you."

"So which is it? More tempted to beat me or more tempted to fuck me?"

"The two aren't mutually exclusive, Pet." Mindfang mutters, leaning in and nipping at her neck just beneath her ear. Rosa shivers, transfixed by the sight of it in the mirror. Mindfang glances up, bright eyes glittering with satisfaction.

"I'm assuming you're alluding to some sort of sexual perversion, and I feel the need to remind you, Mistress, that I have very little understanding of the full panorama of your sexual desires."

"That's a lot of words to say that you're pure as the driven snow," Mindfang mutters, finally kissing her. She's warm and comfortable, their bodies fitting together like they were designed to. In heels she's just tall enough for Rosa to tuck her head beneath her ear. It's easier than anything to allow herself to be kissed. Mindfang pulls away, regretfully, and Rosa lets out a soft sigh of
disappointment.

"Come along, darling." Mindfang murmurs, softly nudging her towards the door. Rosa steps out onto the deck without having to be asked twice and Mindfang follows. She drapes a cloak over Rosa's shoulders. It's a garment she hasn't seen before, made from a thick grey wool that's seen better days but isn't in poor condition. Certainly good enough for Rosa's needs. It's lined in fur against the bitter cold and Rosa rubs her cheek against it. She takes it as a peace offering. Even if Mindfang's angry with her, at least she's still being a good person. A good mistress? Is that a phrase she's allowed to use in good conscience?

When she takes her fist steps back on land, Rosa gasps. The sensation beneath her feet is terrifying and, for the wild space of a dizzying minute she wants to turn and race back up the gangplank to collapse on the deck. She's afraid because, to be quite frank, she can only recollect what happened the last time she stepped off deck But Mindfang is right behind her and doesn't seem at all bothered by recollections, so she lets an arm wrap around her waist and listens to the low, lilting voice that whispers in her ear: 'you're doing beautifully, my darling.'

She takes a few more steps with her fingers buried in the expensive wool of Mindfang's coat, not trusting the newly gelatinous substance beneath her boots not to suddenly gape and send her plummeting down, down, down, far into the center of the earth. Realistically, she knows it's farcical to be so afraid. She's seen countless sailors traipse up and down between the space of sea and shore without suffering for it. And if there was anything to be afraid of Mindfang wouldn't have let her off the ship.

She's a worrier, fretting to the point that Rosa doesn't know if it's born of a lack of trust or a natural need to shelter the people around her. Trust doesn't seem like a factor that her Mistress spares much thought towards, but Rosa's watched her enough to realize she's under the thumb of a woman who trusts no one with painful instinct. No matter how much she devotes herself, she's always calculating, always retreating to her little dark cabin with her blank books and her ink and her dreams.

"You're okay." Mindfang repeats and a gentle hand cards itself through her hair. "You just need to walk for a bit to get your legs back."

"First you make me tragically ill and then you proceed to take away my ability to be ambulatory," Rosa grumbles without malice because she's right-- she's always right. Her feet are already beginning to steady as they stroll down the cobblestones towards the space where the docks give away to a more civilized place with flowers in window boxes and spotless glass facades. "I think you may be scheming against me."

"Clearly I'm not doing it subtly enough." Mindfang snorts, aghast, but her arm slips to her waist and holds her a little more casually. "Damned virago."

She accents the phrase like a poet would, each syllable of da-mn-ed spoken aloud with precision, virago curling off her tongue like her voice can manifest itself past her lips and twine it's way around Rosa's neck like a badge of courage.

She's nervous, Rosa realizes with a jolt, and her fingers relax a little. It's becoming easier to stand taller, simpler to stabilize her equilibrium and take a deep breath. "Well, that's hardly my fault. I can't help that I pay attention to things."

"As opposed to my not paying attention to anything whatsoever?"

"No. As opposed to your obsessively documenting it for future posterity instead of processing any of it."
The surprised laugh that slips from Mindfang's throat is all the reassurance Rosa needs to rest her head on her Mistress's shoulder and smile. The fingers on her waist curl a little closer, her grasp just tight enough to send whispers of 'mine, all mine' up and down Rosa's spine.

They stay quiet for a few moments as they walk along and Rosa finds herself glad for the warmth of her cloak. It struck her as almost extravagant on board the ship but now, walking into a port city surrounded by dozens of faces, she's grateful for its cover. It doesn't hide her from the world, doesn't obscure her face or alter her appearance but it functions as a shelter, something she can shiver behind and no one can see.

"Feeling better?" Mindfang asks, softly, as they finally enter the city outright via passage into a spacious courtyard. There's an empty fountain that must be beautiful and burbling during the summers with lovers seated on its ledge, but is now coated in a thin layer of frost. There's shops surrounding the entire space, storefronts lit up in the mid-day dreariness and cafes with covered tables and chairs on their terraces.

She nods and smiles and Mindfang's brow relaxes a little. She seems relived by this admission and kisses her softly on the forehead. Rosa flushes a little because they're in public and she hardly thinks it's appropriate but, well, it is rather flattering to have someone so willing to share her affection.

Mindfang leads her over to a conveniently placed bench and they both sit down. Rosa hadn't realized how out of breath she was until she gets a chance to relax. She can't stop glancing around the town square in short bursts, her eyes refusing to focus on anything. There's a stationary store, a liquor shop, a haberdasher, a tailor-- there's a lot and it's all so bright, all so wonderful and perfect and alive.

"You look like you've just met a ghost and been informed you're secretly a princess." Mindfang says with a girlish giggle that makes her seem ten years younger. "Have you really never seen a port city before?"

"No," Rosa says with a brilliant grin, her face coloring rapidly with her excitement. "No, never."

"I'm sorry that it had to be this one, then," Mindfang says with a sad little sigh. She rests her head on Rosa's shoulder, staring out across the square. "The North isn't particularly nice at this time of year. The only reason I'm here is that I had some rather urgent business with a local merchant."

"Oh?"

She wrinkles her nose and Rosa feels teeth prick slightly at her neck. The warning is tempered, however, by Mindfang's gloved hand curling around her bare, freezing fingers. "Try not to get so overexcited, Pet, it's a little overwhelming."

"My apologies, Mistress, but I can't find it in me to be disappointed by much." She murmurs, slipping her other hand into Mindfang's pocket. "I've always wanted to see the world."

"Well, this part of the world sucks ass." She mutters, snorting a little. "I'll have to take you to the south to where things are properly civilized. I think you'd like it there more. You said you liked art, correct?"

"Yes, Mistress, I am rather fond of it."

"Well there's some gorgeous museums down there, not to mention the fact that the architecture is simply divine-- honestly, as far as the Baroque period is concerned it's as if time stopped; everything is marble and gilt and oil frescoes, not to mention the gardens and the fountains and the fact that ocean there is simply gorgeous, bluer than a turquoise and tolerably warm for a change." Her voice
has picked up a warm, excited cadence as she talks, trilling over syllables and giving her sentences a fascinating sort of passion that Rosa's only seen before in her journals.

She keeps talking-- telling Rosa about things she can barely understand, dropping names of places and people that sound tantalizingly foreign in a way that makes her suddenly enthralled. She talks as if Rosa can understand her, as if words like 'piazza' and 'ponte' are parts of her vernacular, despite the fact that they're clearly born of a different dialect and time. It's gratifying as much as its styming; while she feels woefully uneducated and more than a little ignorant, it still warms her cheeks to think that Mindfang respects her enough to suppose she knows something of these things.

"--And the food is vastly better; I can't stand eating raw fish, it's disgusting. And there's only so much vodka a woman can drink, you know? Give me decent wine any day."

"That sounds amazing."

"I think you'd fit in nicely," Mindfang murmurs, snapping back to reality as the bell in the clock tower chimes the hour. "I'd love to show you around sometime."

"...I'd like that." She says, softly, squeezing Mindfang's hand. "Thank you."

"Stick with me and you'll see every inch of this godforsaken planet," Mindfang murmurs into her ear before kissing her temple. "Not that you have much of a choice, mind you--"

"Thank you for ruining that moment for the both of us." Rosa mutters, rolling her eyes. Mindfang shrugs a little and reaches up to trail her fingers along the irritated strip of skin where her collar had sat for so many months. Rosa's skin twitches beneath her fingertips, even clad in leather as they are.

"Sorry, Pet," She says with smirk. Mindfang goes in for a kiss and nips softly at her bottom lip. Rosa is less than willing to kiss her in public but, well, she's in no position to say no. So she shifts a little closer and tries to smile at the feel of Mindfang's hand wrapped around her own.

Pretending this is a romantic interlude is-- well-- tempting isn't a strong enough word for it. She's chilly enough that curling up to Mindfang could be excused as a necessity, but, well, it's not. Mindfang is cold herself; Rosa would really prefer to see her wearing fur, a heavy sable, perhaps, instead of the wool affair she's wrapped up in.

Mindfang breaks the kiss with a happy little noise. Rosa trills in response because well, that's what you do and--

"You make beautiful noises," Mindfang murmurs, nuzzling into her neck. "I'd cage you just to listen to you sing."

Rosa stiffens at that and shies away almost immediately, sitting up straight and withdrawing her hands from Mindfang's.

"...You're ridiculous." Mindfang says with a heavy sigh, reaching out and running her hand over Rosa's hair. "I just think you make rather pretty noises, that's all."

"Everyone makes them, Mistress." She says, a little missishly. She's ashamed at the sound of it because, well, she needs to remember her place--

"Well--" Mindfang breaks off and sighs. "Well. I think you make them beautifully."

Rosa gives her a wan smile. Mindfang tries to smile back but the expression is less than successful. Awkward, tense, painful-- there's a thousand words she could use to describe it but all she knows is
that, well, something isn't right. Something isn't right and as much as she wants to fix it--

She's not going to. It's up to Mindfang to repair this, not her. She's given up enough, she's fought hard enough--

"Alright. Enough talking, darling, we've got business to get done."

"Business?" She asks, softly, trying to shake off her twinge of hurt that surfaces against her better judgment. "What business?"

"Getting you some proper clothes, for one."

"...I feel as if I should decline, but I must admit to being rather seduced by the idea of clothing that fits."

"Yes, you and I are rather--" She makes a vague hand gesture, up and then across. Rosa supposes she means to indicate the fact that Rosa is taller and more slim-framed than she herself is, a fact that's most definitely evidenced by the dress that hangs oversized and short on her beneath her coat. "Differently shaped."

"Mmmm."

"And I don't mean this rudely, Pet, but those clothes don't exactly suit you, per say."

"They do not, no." Rosa admits with a bit of a smile. Mindfang grins back.

"So if you're feeling put out by my desire to... fix you up a bit, I do apologize. But I am doing it for completely selfish reasons, you know."

"Oh, yes, I'm quite aware." She arches and eyebrow and gives Mindfang a soft smile. "Might as well be proud of your purchase."

"I would prefer to phrase it as 'maintaining my investment for future gain on capital loss' but I don't intend on letting you go quite so soon."

She's teasing. Rosa knows she's teasing. But it's still hard to hear and something in her stomach knots up and makes her stand a little more stiffly at Mindfang's side as they stroll off down a side street.

They walk in tense silence for a few minutes, Mindfang's arm possessively looped around her as if she's afraid that by taking ownership she's somehow caused Rosa to decide to run.

"I'm not going to leave, you know." She says, softly, and her voice is stronger than she thought it would be. "I'm perfectly aware I'm better off at your side than I would be anywhere else."

It's not the right thing to say, she knows that. The right thing to say would be something more friendly, more flattering, more warm-- but lately she hasn't felt the urge to delve into her reservoirs of patience to soothe a ruffled ego.

Mindfang snorts and mutters something indecipherable under her breath. Her grip on Rosa gets even tighter, if that's possible and she says again:

"Do you think I'm going to give you the chance to go?"

"No." She says without needing to think of it. "You'll keep me at your side until I outlive my novelty and then perhaps you'll set me off someplace under your protection and expect me to live out my life without disturbing you."
"We need to change the subject before I get angry."

"My apologies, Mistress."

"You're lying. You're not sorry." Mindfang mutters a little more darkly than Rosa is expressly comfortable with, but before she can open her mouth to cover her tracks because oh god she really doesn't want to be abandoned, she really doesn't, Mindfang is ushering her through a doorway.

"We'll discuss this back on board the ship." Mindfang mutters and for a few moments Rosa's warmed by the knowledge that she's obtained a victory-- however underhanded-- over the pirate. But it's not enough, it's never enough.

"Don't be angry." She says, and it's pathetic. It's absolutely pathetic because her voice cracks and she reaches forward and clings to the back of Mindfang's coat. "Please, Mistress--"

Mindfang glances over her shoulder and gives her a skeptical glare. Before Rosa can make a scene, however, she's beckoning her forward and pulling her close.

"I told you I wouldn't let you go. You seem to think that has something to do with your place in the social hierarchy," She whispers. "But I'm relatively sure it has something to do with the fact that I'm a possessive bitch."

Well.

That's... Rosa blinks and lets out a nervous laugh that makes Mindfang flush a little-- but, well, she looks gratified to see Rosa perk up.

At least she didn't have to be the one to say it.

"Thank you, Mistress. I, well-- I mean-- I mean to say--"

But before she can get her sentence out there's a shop assistant scurrying over to them. Rosa had completely forgotten that they're in a public forum and as quickly as her drive to fight had been found, it dies. She shrinks into herself and immediately slinks behind Mindfang, frantically grasping her hand. Mindfang squeezes her hand reassuringly and casts her a flickering, startled glance.

"Welcome, welcome!" She chirps with a smile that's too wide for Rosa to feel comfortable with. There's an inherent distrust of anyone who's happy rooted so deeply in her soul that it makes her want to punch this woman immediately.

"Welcome, welcome!" She chirps with a smile that's too wide for Rosa to feel comfortable with. There's an inherent distrust of anyone who's happy rooted so deeply in her soul that it makes her want to punch this woman immediately.

"How may I help you this afternoon, ladies?"

Oh dear, there's a lot of people in here. A lot of people. And so much clothing-- so much clothing she can barely believe it. It's so overwhelming she just wants to crawl off do a dark corner and breathe deeply for as long as she's permitted.

Mindfang seems less than inclined to remain inside when she catches a glimpse of Rosa's face, and hears the soft noise of distress she makes when she tries to move further away. But she's been with her Mistress long enough now that she knows there's no chance of her backing down.

"We had an unfortunate accident this past week and my companion's entire wardrobe has gone missing. I'm afraid we're going to need to start from the ground up." Mindfang lies with ease, face shifting, easily, to fill in the proper emotions. Rosa tries to match the bravado, but knows she's failing.
"Oh goodness that's absolutely dreadful, you poor thing!" The shopkeeper gasps, with her eyes wide and pitying. For a moment Rosa is gob smacked because-- seriously? Is this woman showing legitimate grief over the idea that her clothing was lost at sea? Aren't there far more appropriate things to be mourning?

But, alas, she's quite serious. She doesn't wait for a response before starting off on a quick walkthrough of the shop, keeping up a quick narrative of what's for sale. Mindfang follows her disinterestedly and Rosa can only assume she's bored at the repetition of knowledge she's heard millions of times. She herself is torn between overawed shock at the sight of so many clothes in one place-- all of them perfect and beautiful and in such a variety of colors and style-- and a steadily growing fear at the number of unknown individuals surrounding her.

If Mindfang tries to withdraw her hand she's going to bawl like a child and cling to her legs because like hell is she willing to be alone, even if it's only inside of a clothing store.

Another part of her, however, wants to stop in her tracks and slap Mindfang across the face for forcing her to do this. And then maybe they can go back to the ship where it's warm and safe, then she can curl up in Mindfang's bed and read.

But no, they're looking for clothes. Rosa thought this would be somewhat enjoyable but it isn't, really. The assistant eventually guides them both to what looks like a heavily mirrored sitting room. Rosa recognizes it as a dressing room; her stint as a seamstress was short-lived, but she did enough work to know some of the basics. She didn't work in a high-end boutique marketing high couture, like this place, but it was a nice enough place.

"I'll start pulling a few things for you, ladies." She says, softly, giving them both a wide smile Rosa bets is reserved for the best customers. "Feel free to browse at your leisure."

Rosa sinks onto one of the couches with her brow furrowed. Mindfang sits down beside her, sitting elegantly straight with her legs crossed. Rosa shifts closer to her and, to her own horror, she lets out a soft whine. Mindfang gives her the thousand-mile stare of a woman who's getting tired of this shit before softening.

"You're fine," She murmurs, reaching out to take Rosa's hand in her own. "Come along, Pet, don't cry."

"I'm not going to cry, Mistress," She mutters, trying to sound sure of this fact. Mindfang reaches out and carefully adjusts the scarf that's covering up her collar mark. "I-- I haven't been around this many people in... a while." Since her son was killed, in fact. Before then, large crowds of people were still an abject threat.

"I'd ask if you'd like to look around and see if there's anything you like, but I have the feeling you might freak out." Mindfang murmurs, her voice low and neutral. Rosa breaks out of her reverie to realize that she has her face buried into her hands and, to her shock, is trembling.

"One of us needs to follow her, you know." Mindfang hints, almost pointedly. "Perhaps it would be best to allow myself and our new assistant friend to look for suitable apparel?"

Rosa nods and swallows. "I-- Um-- Think that might be advisable, Mistress."

Mindfang leaves without glancing over her shoulder. Rosa slumps against the couch, relieved. She's not sure what to do with the tension flickering between them-- how to alleviate it, how to keep it from growing, how to make Mindfang forgive her and, well--
Why does Mindfang have to be the one doing the forgiving anyways? Why shouldn't she be the one fighting to be bribed for forgiveness? Because she's the slave, that's why. Honestly. At the rate she's allowing herself to believe that she's Mindfang's friend instead of her, well, slave.

This is hell. This is absolute hell. Rosa groans.

* * *

It doesn't get better when the shop's assistant reappears before Mindfang returns. She's still smiling, her hair now tied in a ponytail at the crown of her head with a mint green ribbon. She has curls that are perfectly formed, as if she wrapped her hair around a barrel and it somehow stayed exactly as it was. Her face is bright and unguarded, blush brightening her cheekbones and making her eyes glitter with girlish excitement.

She's wearing black, a black dress that goes down to her elbows and swishes about her knees. The only trace of color on her is the ribbon in her hair. Rosa approves; it looks like something Rosa herself would like to wear. Rosa's surprised to see she's not carrying any clothing. There's a black something draped over her arm, and, as she waltzes over to Rosa with her black high heeled shoes clicking on the floor, she shakes it out it. It's a black robe, shorter yet more modest than Mindfang's back on board the ship.

"The Marquise wasn't entirely sure what size you were, so I need to take your measurements before we can really find you any clothing," she begins and Rosa's immediately stymied by the use of Mindfang's title. She's used to thinking of foretitles as something akin to honorable mentions. In the circles she ran in they never amounted to much of anything. Rosa's own title is Apostate, which is extremely factual, so perhaps her surprise at learning that Marquise is, in fact, an aristocratic title is naive. The girl is remarkably chipper, her voice friendly and warm but Rosa isn't sure she likes friendly and warm. She likes Mindfang's voice, twining around her like a panther staking her territory and covering her in soft marks of condescension and affection.

"Miss? Miss are you alright?"

Rosa snaps her attention back to the world as fast as she can and tries to smile. "I-- I'm sorry, but I'm quite out of sorts."

"Oh, no need to apologize! It's fine!" She says with a dismissive wave of her hands. "We all get stressed out sometimes."

The smile this time, is sincere. A little less wide, a little less strained. Rosa finds herself smiling back, a shy hesitant smile but a smile nonetheless.

Rosa's motioned off of the couch with a smile and a friendly request. She's beckoned over to stand on a dais in the center of the room and, for what feels like the first time in years she's staring at herself.

She doesn't like it. So she quickly diverts her gaze and frowns, biting at her lower lip. She doesn't want to think about this at all.

She cannot remember the last time she saw herself in full. A vague memory of herself resurfaces from when she was sixteen years old-- almost seven and a half sweeps-- standing in front of a gilt framed mirror laughing and grinning at the sight of herself in a real dress, a floor length evening gown with a neckline so low that her lusus chittered anxiously over her shoulder.

"I used to have long hair," She says in an almost bewildered voice. "Like yours," Rosa adds in a
quieter tone because as the younger woman steps up behind her with a measuring tape she sees her for the first time and she's bright, chipper, brilliant-- all those wonderful things that she used to be.

Now? She looks at herself again and once more has to look away. A raw, burning feeling is spreading down her throat because all she can think about is, well--

Laughing, eyes bright and not yet green. A figure that's full and voluptuous. A smile that's unguarded and just a little wicked because, well, when you know you're going to spend the rest of your days underground you don't hesitate to break a few rules. And-- well--

She wasn't afraid of that girl.

"Miss? I'm, um, going to need to ask you to take your dress off so I can get proper measurements."

Rosa feels absolutely nauseous. But she'll be damned if she shows it because-- well-- if she's going to cry she'll do it in front of Mindfang, thank you.

"Of course," Rosa murmurs, forcing her face to stay in the bland sort of expression she's found can suit almost any social situation.

The girl is remarkably quicker with the buttons on the back of her dress than Mindfang was. Before Rosa knows it she's clutching the dress as it slips off her shoulders.

"Bit big?" She asks with a warm giggle. Rosa nods and gives her a tight smile. With a sinking heart she slips out of the dress.

She is all but naked, now, and makes the unfortunate mistake of stealing a glance at herself in the full length mirrors that surround her.

The sight isn't at all welcoming and she can't help but stare at what she sees. Ribs that stick out like a ladder up her torso, collarbones that cut out like boulders in a stream of wan grey flesh. She has scars, remarkable scars and patches of flesh that are dry and mottled and almost white.

She looks like hell. And the worst part is that she knows that this is the best she's looked in-- well-- years. Sleeping all day, eating more than enough, lounging around in a featherbed and getting fresh air for once.

Mindfang is taking good care of her. Despite what her logical side informs her about the detriments and horrors of slavery, she's-- well-- she's content to be with her Mistress.

The other woman is looking at her with wide eyes, her smile slipping for a few moment. Rosa turns and blinks at her, raising an eyebrow.

"I do apologize for not wearing a proper corset," She says, because, well, it seems like the right thing to do when confronting a complete stranger with her breasts. "But you may have noticed that the Marquise is rather... larger than I am."

"You have so many scars--"

"I know, dear. It happens." Rosa murmurs, smiling and sighing softly. "With age comes experience and sometimes experience isn't all that nice."

The tape measure is produced with slightly tremulous hands. Her measurements are taken in due course and Rosa notes with a slightly sardonic pride that she finally has a twenty-four inch waist, something she remembers struggling towards as a teenager and now feels she's being punished for.
She lets out a soft murmur of thanks as the black robe is handed to her. Rosa pulls it on and ties it without a word. Her companion gives her a terse smile before skittering out of the room, presumably to find her clothing and not, well, bring her concerns to Mindfang.

Mindfang reappears before the girl does, sinking down into a waiting armchair without a word. She gives Rosa a wry smile.

"So. What's this I've just been asked about you being seriously ill?"

"I suspect it has something to do with the fact that I weigh roughly a hundred pounds and I look like my torso was used to sharpen a sword," Rosa mutters in response, allowing her eyes to drift close. Anxiety is crushing down on her from every angle now that Mindfang has returned. She wants to cry, cry alone and unnoticed. Perhaps she can sneak down into the hold once more to get some peace and quiet?

Years ago she'd retreat to the singular solace of her little room in the Caverns, a space that was half the size of the cabin Mindfang had allotted her before-- well-- unofficially moving her in. She'd retreat there and knit, the clicking of rosewood needles and the feel of yarn, soft and sensuous beneath her fingertips, melting her mind into nothingness.

Mindfang doesn't look shocked but she hardly looks pleased. "Are you really in such terrible shape? I don't want to be accused of neglecting you."

"You're not." She mumbles, wishing against all logic that Mindfang will beckon her over and wrap her arms around her waist and tease her. "I'm very grateful--"

"Shht. I don't want to hear it."

"But I--"

"Rosa." She snarls, looking brooding and every inch the romantic, lovelorn, wild heroine. If this were a novel-- well-- she wouldn't be nearly so afraid of this place and its people. Since when has she been afraid of people? Forever? She doesn't remember being afraid of people when she was a teenager. But thirty years underground and thirty three more on the run from the Empire have all but erased the eighteen she spent safe and sound.

"Rosa--" Mindfang repeats, reaching over to the couch and running her fingers through Rosa's hair. It's soft and gentle and everything affectionate and the gesture is enough to bring tears to her eyes. Mindfang looks upset, incredibly upset. There's tension near her eyes and in her jaw. Rosa's sure they're a few moments away from abandoning this appointment and scurrying off to a doctor. But that would be a little more extreme than necessary--

"I am your slave." She whispers, swallowing with a dry throat. Mindfang lets out an irate huff but Rosa still sees her color guiltily.

"Yes." Mindfang agrees, and Rosa's glad because-- well-- denying it won't make things any better. "But that doesn't make you any less alive and any less-- deserving."

Rosa doesn't know what she deserves. But she knows there's more to Mindfang's treatment of her, something beyond respect for her fellow woman, beyond a need to gain a good reputation. Mindfang could care less about her reputation and, well, Rosa would be lying if she hadn't heard dark words of criticism spoken of the Captain by her crew.

"Well. Still. It's generous of you." Rosa finishes, lamely, because a conversation regarding the status
of their relationship is eminent if she says much more.
"And I appreciate your approbation of my status as a living being."

Mindfang rolls her eyes but pulls her over to place a soft kiss on her forehead. "You let me know if you need anything, won't you?"

"I will, Mistress." She says, softly, and Mindfang gives her a scrutinizing glare before turning away with a huff.

An idle hand wraps around her shoulders and strokes through the hair at the nape of her neck. She wants to crawl into Mindfang's lap and allow herself to be held, allow herself to be rocked into calm.

* * *

They remain in a halcyon state until the shop girl returns. She's clearly startled by Mindfang's presence but has the grace to curtsey and smile all the same.

"I-- um-- we need to-- um--" This clearly isn't an easy request she's trying to make. It's unfortunate, really, because if she's similar to Mindfang in any way it's in that neither of them will accept silliness or, well, go out of their way to alter a potentially awkward situation.

"She's not wearing a corset," The woman finally blurts out, flushing a brilliant green. "And I need to fit her. And she's going to be, well, um-- naked."

"Oh how dreadful." Mindfang says, with a completely serious face. "I don't know if I can accept such a lack of decorum."

"Heaven knows you'd never want to see my breasts," Rosa mutters and then yelps when Mindfang tugs her hair ever so slightly.

"But-- Um--"

Rosa lets out a soft sigh and gets to her feet. Before Mindfang can comment again-- or before things can become an issue-- she's dropped her robe to the floor.

This time, it's Mindfang that sucks in a sharp breath. She stops herself before she says anything but she stares at Rosa's reflection with eyes that are wide and shocked.

Rosa wants to laugh. She shouldn't but, well, she can't help it. It's a comical situation. Rosa wants to wrap her arms around her and tell her she's fine but-- well--

When the shop assistant clears her throat, Mindfang's stare snaps from the mirror to her. Immediately, Rosa's breath catches in her throat because, well, that's not a friendly look.

That's not a friendly look at all. Mindfang's hands tighten on the arms of her chair and her fangs almost make an appearance. But Rosa coughs as well and then the focus is transferred back.

After holding up a few things for Rosa's opinion and only getting the Marquise's she gives up and directs all her comments to Mindfang.

The two of them finally settle on a piece that's simple but still a little too lacy for Rosa's peace of mind, but, well... It's better than some of the other things.

Rosa has done her best to preserve her modesty without being too obvious about it; she's crossed her arms over her breasts and has stood at the angle that least reflects her nakedness. She's not exactly
happy about her nudity but—well—

If Mindfang was ever going to see her naked, at least it's in an environment where she can't object immediately. She's seen her in the bathtub, of course. But that's—well—different.

When the girl steps up behind her, however, she's forced to move her arms. The idea that she's about to be manhandled seems to occur to them simultaneously because Mindfang's face breaks into a fierce glower.

Oh goodness gracious. Rosa raises her eyebrows, and for the first time in ages...

Smirks. Mindfang absorbs the look with a show of teeth but, well, it's hard to take her seriously when she's so clearly shaken by the idea of another woman touching her...woman.

"May I?" The girl asks, softly, giving Rosa a smile that's clearly intended to soothe frazzled nerves.

Oblivious. Yes, that's exactly what she'd say to describe her. How can she not be picking up on the tension in the room? It's quite the skill, really.

Mindfang's staring, tight lipped and narrow eyed as the assistant's hands assist her into the bustier. A muscle in her face twitches twice and Rosa sees her bite her lip in an effort to make it stop.

Rosa doesn't know what to make of it but dread starts to flourish in her stomach. What's going on? Why is she upset? Has she done something wrong?

She's almost too preoccupied to notice how she looks. But when the garment tightens, sharply, around her ribcage she's forced to pay attention. The nimble hands of the woman behind her have laced the garment in a matter of moments and now she's adjusting it with the falcon eyes of someone skilled at the art of adjustment.

"Oh my," Rosa breathes, eyes going a little wide because, well, she likes this. This is shockingly appealing, incredibly appealing. The feel of satin against her skin makes her shiver and the slight scratch of lace is enough to remind her to stand straight.

She feels elegant and almost marvellously lithe, her waist contoured and her breasts supported. Is this what undergarments are meant to do? She's relatively sure that she never realized there was a specific purpose to them beyond modesty. The combination of black lace and satin against her skin is dramatic and, well—

"There," The woman behind her chirps. "Perfect fit!"

She reaches up to adjust one of the cups, but before her fingers can make contact with her skin Mindfang snarls.

Rosa has heard her snarl before. She's heard her snarl and hiss and, on a few memorable occasions, trill and purr. But never in front of anyone else, not even when her sailors push her to the breaking point.

The gesture is withdrawn immediately with a sharp gasp of fear. Rosa doesn't react. She takes a breath, turns her head slowly and raises an eyebrow. Mindfang looks murderous. It's actually an expression she finds admirable, now that she's aware she's not on the receiving end of her temper.

"Come along, darling," She murmurs, softly, giving Mindfang her most reassuring smile. "The poor girl is only doing her job."
Mindfang doesn't seem to appreciate the moniker and turns her narrowed eyes on Rosa. "I don't want her touching you any more than is necessary."

"Marquise," Rosa says, softly but firmly. "Please."

"I'm ever so sorry," The shop girl is blurting, eyes going wide as she takes a few more nervous steps away from Rosa. "I didn't realize the two of you were Matesprits-- I would never--"

"It's fine," Rosa assures her, a blush spreading into her cheeks because, well, she isn't about to deny the claim she stares at Mindfang plaintively and her Mistress rolls her eyes. She still looks murderous but, well, the idea seems to have mollified her quite a bit.

"We're only betrothed." Mindfang says with a melodramatic sigh. "Someone wants to wait to have a proper ceremony."

Rosa stares. She opens her mouth to ask what in the world a betrothal is but Mindfang narrows her eyes and shakes her head. It's a clear 'we'll talk about it later'.

"Regardless," Rosa says, pretending that the obviously veiled barb wasn't referring to her. "If we're going to be buying clothes, you're obligated to allow the poor girl to touch me without being nasty."

Seeming to sense that things are beginning to devolve, the woman gives them both a tense smile.

Mindfang is watching from one of the chairs, sitting back languidly with her legs crossed and her chin propped up in one of her hands. Rosa can't help but assume this is her sort of revenge-- lash out against me and I'll make you remember who's you really are.

"You're so tiny," She says, eyes wide as she steps back and stares, clearly attempting to shift to a less controversial topic-- or behavior, as the case would have it.

Rosa and Mindfang are still glowering at one another. The girl clears her throat and laughs, nervously.

"I didn't mean to be rude, but-- Your waist is... just..."

"Gorgeous, isn't she?" Mindfang murmurs, her voice bored and it makes Rosa stiffen. She wants to turn to her and ask if she really is displeased or if this is just another way to get her own feet beneath her. There's a soft sigh behind her, though, and Mindfang gets to her feet, slowly, and steps up behind her. She trails her fingers down Rosa's spine with a smirk and whispers into her ear:

"You're not getting flattery out of me that easily."

And then she turns to the assistant and says: "Do we have any stockings, my dear? I'd like to try some shoes on her before we look for a full wardrobe."

She smiles, although clearly unsure of what the dynamic between her customers is, and begins to fumble through the pile of lingerie for what Mindfang has requested.

"I am going to make you squirm." She vows, her breath brushing against the nape of Rosa's neck. "And you can't do a thing about it."

This isn't going as hoped. Not at all. When the assistant passes the stockings to Mindfang Rosa almost wants to snap at her, but she restrains herself.

"Thank you dear," Her Mistress purrs and the little shop girl flushes a little. Rosa definitely wants to
snap at her now because, well, she might be owned by Mindfang but Mindfang is hers as well.

"Damn. I didn't bring the shoes." Mindfang mutters, clearly faux disappointedly. "Would you mind? A pair of boots and some heels, perhaps."

"Oh! Oh yes of course Madame."

She slips from the room and almost immediately Rosa's narrowing her eyes and Mindfang's snarling and before either of them can act on it the assistant slips back through the doorway and chirps: "what's your shoe size, Miss?" and they have to pause momentarily to assume face once more.

When she's gone, for good this time, Mindfang glowers at her and the force of her expression is strong enough to make her tremble a little.

"Sit down." She snaps and Rosa sits without needing any more urging. She sits with her knees folded beneath her and Mindfang snarls and topples her over. She lands with her hands behind her, heart pounding, pounding, pounding and then her mistress has taken one of her feet in between her hands.

She's focused all her attention on the arch of her foot and is now beginning to coax the stocking up her leg. Her touch is cool and almost welcome, but Rosa can't relax into it for once and she struggles to get away.

"Stop." Mindfang says, her voice firm and dark. "Stop or I swear you'll regret it."

Rosa stops. She's rewarded with a smirk that's not entirely relieving. Mindfang's purposefully moving slowly. As the fabric of the stocking slips up past her knee she can feel the slight press of perfectly manicured nails against the soft flesh of her inner thigh and it's enough to make her shiver in a way that's not entirely bad.

When her stockings are finally pushed up to the point where they'll stay put, Mindfang doesn't pull away. She's sitting on the dais now, and her body's stretched out over her own prone form.

It's a compromising position. It's a very compromising situation. They both recognize it, that much is obvious in the way that both their faces are flushing. Mindfang, however, seems far more comfortable with herself. Slowly, and with deliberate motions that can't be read as anything but predatory, she presses her hands to the floor of the dais. One of them goes just beside her hip, close enough that Mindfang's wrist digs into her flesh. Her other hand goes, finger by finger, just between the space of her thighs.

She's close. She's too close. She moves even closer, pushing herself forward until she's on her knees and their faces are close enough to touch. Without her coat hanging around them Rosa feels like they're far too exposed, far too easy to observe.

When she takes a deep, shuddering breath in the vain hope of steadying her nerves, Mindfang smirks. She drops her head low, just low enough that their lips touch and even though it isn't a kiss the feeling is electrifying. She wants to wrap herself around her, arms slipping across her scarred, muscular back to grip onto her and feeling the chilly warmth of Mindfang's body pressed against her own.

She wants to hold her close, close enough that she can feel comforted for the space of a few minutes and whisper into her ear: 'I'm so sorry, I didn't want to hurt you, I was wrong' but she knows that's not fair to either of them, to offer up so much forgiveness before she's asked for it.

Mindfang finally moves closer and deepens their kiss. Rosa lets out a muffled gasp and wishes she
could move closer but doesn't trust herself to remain propped up by the force of a single arm. She's trapped and Mindfang knows it and--

"I'm never going to let you go," She vows, pulling away enough that her voice reverberates between them. The force of her gaze is magnetic and there's an intensity there that makes Rosa's chest tighten up with such a strange sort of need that she's never felt before.

Without waiting for her to respond, Mindfang lowers her lips to Rosa's neck and there's a queer sort of pressure. She's biting down just enough that she can feel the press of teeth. Wordlessly, without an explanation, she moves her head down and begins to leave a trail of kisses. She's still biting and there's an urgency to her movements that shocks her.

"You can't decide that." She says quietly, and Mindfang's response to that is to life up her head and snarl, her fangs fully bared and her body tense. "You can't. You know you can't."

"I already have, Pet." Mindfang hisses, pulling away from her neck with one last prick of her teeth. "Stop fussing and just accept it."

Rosa doesn't want to accept it. Accepting it will just make her life hell and so she shoves Mindfang off of her and sighs. What can she do? What can she do? Cry? Sob? Beg? No, none of that is appropriate. But she's covered in-- well-- marks of ownership and condescension. And it's almost as good as a collar because a troll with a bitten up is a troll with a mate. And no one wants to fight for supremacy.

"Mistress." She says, softly, her voice intended to be quiet and lulling. "Are you jealous?"

"Yes."

"You, a Marquise and the undisputed Queen of the seas, feel threatened by a girl who can't be even half my age, who works as a shop assistant."

Mindfang doesn't seem too happy about that phrasing. She gives her a lovely show of fangs and shoves Rosa back onto the dais, hard, so hard the breath is knocked out of her.

Rosa lets out a quiet keen but Mindfang doesn't relent. She presses her lips to Rosa's throat and she barely hears the whisper of: "You are mine and I will not consent to share you." Mindfang hisses and her voice brokers no argument. Rosa lets out a gasp when she feels teeth sinking into her throat once more, this time a true bite.

The pressure lets up as soon as it had begun. But before Rosa can apologize, Mindfang's focus has shifted once more.

"If you're so insecure, perhaps you should be the one dressing me." She manages to breathe out despite the flickers of pain. Mindfang growls at that and Rosa's rather positive that she's going to find a whip on her back by the end of the day.

"I wouldn't let her touch me if it weren't necessary." She soothes, wondering why she's the one trying to be calm and considerate when she has a set of fangs against her throat and her head wrenched all the way back. "You know that, Mistress."

"...Who do you belong to?" Mindfang asks with a hiss, forcing her to make eye contact.

Ugh. Really? Really? But she forces a smile all the same as she whispers. "You, Mistress."
"That's right." She mutters, still glowering. She releases Rosa's chin, however, and instead presses her fingers into the bruises already blossoming around her neck. "Don't you dare allow another woman to touch you."

"You're being unreasonable." Rosa murmurs, pretending that she didn't let out a breathy moan at the feeling of Mindfang's fingers against her neck. "You must know the only way I'll end up with a wardrobe is if you allow the poor girl to touch me."

The moan, she's sure, is what spares her from being scared into submission. Mindfang huffs, growls once more, and then traces her fingers along the lace trim of the bustier.

"It doesn't count if you're in the room and can stop it." She murmurs, her eyes fluttering a little when Mindfang finishes the job that the shop girl began and adjusts the bustier so it sits properly.

Mindfang still glares but she inclines her head enough that Rosa takes it as a gesture of acquiescence. She gives her the widest smile she can muster, given the fact they've just admitted that Rosa's a piece of claimed property.

"You look nice." Mindfang finally says, grudgingly. "Very nice. I'd like you in green, more, however."

"Ask for it in green, then."

Mindfang shrugs, and gets to her feet, slowly. She helps Rosa up and nuzzles into her with an affectionate, apologetic trill. "That would require her touching your breasts again. So I think we'll skip that option."

Rosa laughs. Laughs and drops her head back to chortle freely, her face splitting into a broad grin. Mindfang joins in, although to a much lesser extent. Before she knows it she's being yanked over to Mindfang's already-claimed armchair.

She's pulled into her Mistress's lap and brooded over, her scars examined and every inch of skin receiving critical acclaim.

Mindfang sighs, heavily. She presses her lips just beneath her ear and--

"You're too skinny." She mutters, finally. "I need to feed you more. You sure you don't need sunlight?"

"Mistress, I must admit I never say no to food." She says with a laugh and Mindfang seems to appreciate that.

Mindfang rolls her eyes and then, of course, she's being groped. "Dove, you're beautiful. But I'd like to see a little more meat on these."

"...Are you insulting my breasts?"

"No. They've very nice. Fit in my hands perfectly, which is always a good thing. I'm just saying... you're emaciated." She makes a funny little noise in her throat. "And while I don't necessarily mind your skinny little ass digging into my lap, I'd like to know it's your metabolism at work and not my neglect."

"You're not neglecting me." Rosa hisses and there's enough temper in her voice that Mindfang carefully takes her hands off of her breasts and pouts.
She rests her chin on Rosa's jutting collarbone. "At least let me take you to lunch?"

"...If that's what you wish, Mistress." She says, carefully hiding her smile. Mindfang sees it anyways and gives her a slow once over before leaning in once more for a kiss.

"I'm sorry I'm such a domineering bitch." She mumbles against her lips. "I-- I just really like you."

The last sentence comes out in a rush, words tripping over each other like moonbeasts on the scent of a wounded deer. It's clear that Mindfang isn't happy to be saying it but knows it has to be said.

"And I don't want to lose you just because I'm an idiot."

She's blushing but Rosa still leans in and kisses her cheek. "I'd be disappointed in anything less, Mistress. You are a pirate after all."

They curl close to one another and she assumes it's enough of an affirmation to keep her Mistress quiet because Mindfang simply strokes her hair and remains curled up close.

* * *

When the girl reappears, she's acting far, far more skittish. She doesn't get too close to Rosa, only approaching her when Mindfang gives her a terse smile and nods. It's clear to everyone in the room who's in charge and Rosa wants to roll her eyes and slap her but-- well...

She is in charge. So she remains in Mindfang's lap until she's ushered back onto the dais. A pile of clothing, all of it black, has been draped over the free couch in the room. Mindfang is examining it, critically, and Rosa hopes her frown is due to consideration-- not displeasure.

There are a lot of dresses to get through. She's not happy about it at all. Not whatsoever. She needs, at the most generous, two dresses. One for warmer weather, one for cooler weather. A good shawl is all that is needed in between. Perhaps a pair of close-fitting leggings and a cloak. But she has a cloak, and Mindfang seems to be more than happy to lend her clothes.

She can live with the chemise they have her try on. She can live with the silk nightgown with the buttons down the front. She can also live with the dressing gown that Mindfang has one of the other girls track down, the only green thing introduced.

Those things are, well... they're luxuries, but they can be explained away as Mindfang not wanting to share her nightclothes any longer. They can also be explained as Mindfang wanting her to look attractive, so she can soothe the ruffled feathers of her conscience easily enough.

But the dresses? The sweaters? The ridiculous amount of clothing that goes on and off her skin is enough to make her start getting skittish.

There's silk and cotton, crisp linens and heavy velvets. There's things with lace and things that are embroidered, skirts that need a petticoat to fill them out--

"We're sailing. On a ship." Rosa mutters, raising her eyebrows as yet another fanciful things is slipped over her shoulders. "This is hardly practical, you know."

"Really, Rosa? I hadn't noticed. I assumed we were going on a pleasure cruise to the tropics and you simply needed a bathing suit and sandals."

"...It just seems a little silly." Rosa murmurs, smoothing her hands over the skirt of her dress, which is a slightly iridescent black taffeta. "I'm not going to any balls."
"How do you know. You can't ever expect what might happen." Mindfang mutters, giving Rosa a warm smile. But she notices the panic creeping in around her eyes and relents.

The massive amount of clothing that's purchased is absolutely staggering to her. She ends up with ten dresses in all, most of them simple. Ten dresses and a good amount of pants and shirts, clothing that's far more suited for a woman who's at sea. A few pairs of shoes are thrown in, a few more shawls and, well, lots of ridiculously lacy underwear.

"Indulge me." Mindfang mutters when she glowers. "Please, darling."

Rosa sniffs. Mindfang snarls. But the clothes are still bought.

She leaves the store in a black dress with a modest, square neckline and sleeves that are fitted down to her wrists. The skirt flourishes around her knees, which are covered in a pair of thick tights. Mindfang had made an argument for a longer, heavier dress but she was vetoed when Rosa shuddered at the oppressive feel of it around her, like robes and a mantle and, well, the distressed sound she made was enough to elicit a new surge of possessive behavior on Mindfang’s behalf.

There's the slightest hint of trim along the hems of the dress, a soft iridescent green, and she drapes her shawl around her neck with a quiet little smile. She's uncomfortable, incredibly uncomfortable accepting charity like this. But is it really charity when you're clothing a woman you own? She doesn't think so. At least, she doesn't want to think so.

Or if it is, it's an act of charity with kind intent. Kindness is never anything to be scoffed at, after all. So she refuses to allow herself to feel offended-- or, at least, does her best not to be offended. It isn't as if she has money to spend on herself.

She is, however, unabashedly happy for the boots. Those are nice. She hasn't worn a decent pair of shoes in, well, decades. No shoes down in the caverns, and not much more than sandals in the desert. And the coat that Mindfang somehow managed to find her is absolutely wonderful, warm and cozy and lined with emerald green silk. The only drawback is crawling out from beneath the coziness of the fur-lined cloak, which she is less than willing to do.

"You can have the cloak back. I'm not getting rid of the cloak." Mindfang soothes in a voice that's controlled but still a little condescending. "But you'd be warmer in the coat. So put it on."

"It seems unnecessary."

"Who's in charge?"

"You." Rosa mutters, allowing Mindfang's incredibly nimble fingers to do up the buttons on the coat. "I just--"

"Will you shut up if I buy you something you want?"

"Probably not."

"Well I'm still going to. Don't you like yarn?"

"There are three things I never say no to." Rosa says, wryly, giving Mindfang her best once over, slow and melodramatic. "Good food, great yarn and attractive pirates."

The laugh she garners is worth the momentary panic the risk warranted.

"I like you." Mindfang says with a grin. It's a childish statement, said with innocence and girlishness.
Mindfang takes her hand in her own, fingers curling softly around her own. Even through the assuredly expensive leather of her gloves, Mindfang’s hand is warm and Rosa blushes instinctively at the contact.

She doesn’t say anything in reply, but she nuzzles in close to Mindfang and hopes that her silence is enough of an affirmation.

* * *

They make it almost all the way down the street arm in arm, Mindfang keeping up a cheerful stream of chatter that is clearly designed to make Rosa laugh.

She's almost allowed herself to be comforted into acquiescence when Mindfang stops in her tracks. Her grip on Rosa's shoulders goes from casual to bone-splintering and she lets out a pained whimper.

Mindfang is staring, hard enough to kill, at a man standing just a few yards away. He's tall and sinuous, with eyes that are as violet as the fires of hell with a bright streak in his hair to match. He's wearing the uniform of a naval authority and Rosa instinctively recoils because, in addition to the offense of being aligned to the Empire, he has gills.

It's not that she's racist. It's just that the last woman she met who had gills murdered her children and sent her off into slavery. Oh, and destroyed her life.

"I have to talk to this man, Pet," Mindfang says in a cosseting voice, squeezing her shoulders and giving her a terse smile. "So go inside the store and don't even think about leaving, do you understand me?"

"Yes." Rosa whispers, her eyes going wide. There's an almost electric tension billowing between Mindfang and the man looming over her shoulder.

"Yes what?" Mindfang hisses, narrowing her eyes. Rosa jolts back-- or at least, tries to, but Mindfang's holding her tight enough her shoulders are bruising.

"Yes, Mistress." Her voice cracks. She's frightened, truly frightened now. Mindfang hasn't looked this angry since-- well-- the other morning when she found her asleep on the docks. But Rosa's never felt in this much danger before--

She turns on her heel and dives into the store before Mindfang can say another word. Her reaction is lost in the jangling of bells and then slamming of the door and Rosa's grateful. She leans against the nearest wall with her heart fluttering like a leaf in the breeze. Her mouth is dry, her hands are shaking and she feels faint all over. It takes her several minutes to feel collected once more and be able to stand straight with composure.

Mindfang, fortuitously, has shoved her into what appears to be a yarn shop. Rosa would like to think it was pure chance but, well, Mindfang doesn't ever seem to do anything unintentionally.

The shop is warm and cozy, walls and floor paneled in a warm, gleaming wood with shelves and baskets and piles of yarn covering every spare inch of space. It is, of course, arranged by color, a gradient of shades ranging the room from the rows of crimson on shelves just beside her to a rich, brilliant violet in the furthest corner of the room.

It's heaven. Absolute heaven. She reaches out and buries her fingers in the nearest ball of yarn, luxuriating in the feel of expensive wool under her fingertips. Lambswool, alpaca, linen, silk-- every shade, every fiber, every weight--

She might cry. It's more overwhelming than the clothes shop, but in a much better way, a way that
she enjoys instead of abhors. All that she's missing is a pair of needles and carte blanche to begin working and she'd die of happiness.

Wandering the store is akin to a religious experience. Ten minutes is all it takes for her to feel something similar to the serenity she always carried with her when she was young and unaware of her fate, the warm sort of quiet pleasure she felt when her son fell asleep in her arms, or when she bent the rules just enough to allow one of the newborns under her care a better chance at living. It's a shock to her system to be so suddenly reminded of the peace she lost.

She sinks into a conveniently located armchair with a soft sigh. Yarn should not make her this melancholy. Nor this blissful. Nor this, well, homesick.

Oh god is that what she's feeling? Homesick? That's ridiculous. But watching Mindfang vanish off with someone who's so clearly an acquaintance, someone who's a part of her life instead of well--

Whatever Rosa is. She rubs at her face with her hands and tries her best to ignore the fact that, suddenly, she wants to cry. She misses her hearth. She misses having a hearth, a place to curl up and forget about the world outside, whether it was in the company of somber women doing somber things or a young couple awkwardly attempting to flirt for the first time-- she misses it like someone has reached in and tugged one of the muscles of her heart out of place.

This is precisely why she shouldn't ever leave Mindfang's side. It's so much easier to forget all of this when, well, she's perpetually terrified of the woman who never leaves her side.

She can't sit here for god knows how long and sulk. Rosa sits up, slowly, breathing in through her nose then exhaling as slowly as she can. Her eyes are already green-rimmed, she's sure, and her face is most definitely flushed. If she runs into anyone at the moment, her caste is going to be far too obvious and-- well--

Honesty. Who is she attempting to deceive-- she wasn't going to leave even if she was immaculate and wearing a veil. Mindfang would know even if she wasn't caught and she's still incredibly tepidious when it comes to her Mistress's temper.

She's pathetic. Tremendously pathetic. Look at how far she's fallen. Fallen from an adolescent girl unafraid to protest against the Reverend Superior of the breeding caverns to a woman too cowed to, well, take some initiative and not act like a kicked puppy.

For hell's sake, she faced down the Empress herself. And lost-- in a sea of bloodshed and tragedy that was still nothing compared to the fathoms of heartbreak rising up in her soul-- but she tried damnit. And now she's hiding in a yarn shop.

This isn't going anywhere beneficial. Rosa stands up on shaking legs and tries to calm herself once more. It's marginally more successful, although not completely so. She wanders around the shop for a few minutes, her fingers trailing absently over the different fibers. Yarn used to make her happy, damnitall. Incredibly happy. An individual solace in a world full of nothing but bloodshed and infants screaming as they face brutal death.

Maybe that’s it. She's remembering the good and the bad? Although, she's rather sure that there’s been far worse in her adult life since then, so that seems like a half-baked theory.

The only good thing about the resurfacing of memories is the slight, comforting knowledge that she'd prefer to be knitting while sitting next to Mindfang instead of knitting hiding in a corner while a rather vicious group of newborns devour one of their still-screeching fellows.
There isn't another living soul in the store and, understandably, she's scared half out of her wits when someone kicks the door open and storms in. She jumps behind a shelf of cashmere, hastily, noting with some degree of ironic amusement that she's surrounded by nothing but shades of blue.

He stomps up the staircase into the loft, his boot prints loud enough to wake the cat curled up on the shop's counter. The animal sits up with an annoyed flicker of wispy gray fur and hisses.

Then, of course, comes the sound of raised voices. Incredibly heated voices, one delicate and ethereal with just the slightest edge of malice and the other, male, and rather distinctly unreasonable.

Rosa does not like confrontation. Not anymore, at least, now that she's seen what happens when you confront the wrong person (or empire). But she knows well enough that nothing good can come of a one-on-one confrontation between a large, angry man and what sounds like a rather dainty female. Not to be sexist, or rude, or stereotypical but--

Anyone who owns a yarn establishment is hardly likely to be a specimen of physical strength. And he was rather large--

"Just because you think you're so damn holy doesn't give you the right to REPORT ME." The unknown male troll bellows and Rosa flinches immediately, then growls.

"Take your hands off of me immediately." Comes a female snarl and then before Rosa can stop herself she's halfway up the stairs.

It isn't her place to intervene, she knows. But that doesn't mean that showing her face and making her presence known will be unappreciated.

She makes it to the landing just in time to see what looks like a rather expensive vase making contact with the man's forehead. Rosa was right in the assumption that the woman was rather slight of build and less than physically intimidating but-- well--

She's holding the shattered base of a vase in her hands, crouched in a fighter's stance. The man lying at her feet is clutching his face and howling and Rosa feels an apology immediately surfacing because, well, clearly, she had things covered but--

Her head snaps up from the face of her victim. She snarls at Rosa from behind a veil that's just translucent enough that they lock gazes. Rosa stares. Stares and lets out a queer little trill that even she herself can't identify.

It doesn't take a seeing eye dog to realize, perhaps, she's more at home than she'd realized. Her lips and fingertips are beginning to go numb and she realizes with horror that she is, in fact, hyperventilating.

The rest of the vase slips from the other woman's fingertips and lands, hard, on the intruder's head. Understandably, he falls unconscious.

The assailant, trim of form and just a few inches shorter than Rosa, steps over him without remark. Rosa's clutching to the railing just along the staircase, her breath still refusing to come in properly.

Long, black lace veil trailing down over her shoulders. a string of jade beads around her neck and a dress that's almost robe-like in its construction--

It's a Sister. One of the Sisterhood, one of her Sisters [1]-- Oh god she can't even remember the formal name for her own Order.
She just knows that this woman is one of her own. Formal garb, noble carrying, eyes that are a hazy green and hair that's been rather practically braided down her back.

Her hands are covered in scars that are more familiar to Rosa's eyes than the ones covering Mindfang's palms, more familiar than the nightmares of her son's screams as he died--

"...Davina?" She asks, her voice shattering as she forces the syllables out. Davina stares at her from behind her veil, her mouth open and eyes wide. She steps forward almost as if she's in slow motion.

She clutches Rosa's face with fingers that are incredibly trembly and oddly warm; she's used to Mindfang's touch and it's chill. But she holds Rosa's face just as tightly and then she lets out a keen.

"Annora.[2]" She gasps, her voice hitching. "Is it really you?"

She isn't ashamed to admit it. Not ashamed at all. She nods and then, of course... bursts into tears.

* * * * *

1. The Dolorosa is referring to her bloodcaste, the jade blooded women who tended the mother grub and all of the little childrens running around murdering each other. Given their position in society, I'm making the assumption that they're of incredible importance socially and have garnered a great deal of reverence. Think of them as the Alternian equivalent of the Vestal Virgins.
   **More details next chapter.

2. Trolls clearly have more than one name, their juvenile name of six letters and their adult names which are eight (maybe there's a seven letter adolescent name in there?). Headcanon here is that your juvenile name is the equivalent of a "Christian" name in earlier societies. It's not Fitzwilliam until you marry Mister Darcy, you know? Juvenile names are only used by members of your quadrants and close friends.
   **Alluded to in the first chapter when the Dolorosa won't tell Mindfang her name.
   **Will probably appear again. A comprehensive list will appear on my tumblr when things get confusing.
or Mindfang went to troll catholic school

Chapter Summary

Rosa has a reunion that makes her remember why she never wanted one. Mindfang buys yarn and then lunch and the Dolorosa breaks open some pretty heavy secrets. And by that I mean she gives a boring history lesson.

Chapter Notes

I have no excuse for any of this. Sorry. DUALSCAR IS IN THE NEXT "CHAPTER" I PROMISE. The way this is all working out I kind of want to break up some of the world-building so I don't make you all want to punch me. But feel free to punch me? I might deserve it.

Again, thank you everyone for reviewing. Also if there's anyone out there who might want to volunteer to illustrate an Alternian creation myth *awkward cough* feel free to hunt me down.

Thank you again to everyone for the wonderful reviews <3 they always make me feel so incredibly warm and fuzzy and never fail to cheer me up! thanks so much! you're the 8est with a capital eight. also if you notice any details I've mis-remembered or typos or anything silly like that, please let me know. At over 200 pages and almost 100,000 words there is no way this is at all near a passing grade at the moment.

Rosa sobs with a passion that surprises her completely, clinging to Davina who, rightfully, refrains from reacting the same way. She always was the composed one, the one who knew how to keep her temper under check and keep from being frightened by the more violent grubs.

Always the dignified, composed one, walking the tunnels and caverns with a slow, purposeful stride, shawl billowing out behind her and lantern held up before her like she was a goddess striding into battle.

Rosa was her apprentice at one time. It was considered an honor to work beneath the Orthodox Cardinal, after all. She was second in command beneath the Reverend Superior, and to be working alongside her--

Well. She was the Darling Initiate then, with long hair, bright eyes and an eagerness to please. It took her almost a year to decide she was rather more inclined to be quietly subversive-- to cover herself in tattoos and piercings and too much makeup.

It took until she left the caverns to chop off her hair. She was subversive, but not suicidal; no one in the sisterhood cut their hair after sojourning into the birthing caverns. It was a tradition she was more than comfortable respecting-- she liked her hair long, after all.

Now that she's been topside for close to forty years, she's less than inclined to obey traditional
strictures. It's given her time to reflect and realize that, just maybe, the Order was a little outdated. But she can't help but sob, she can't help but-- but-- feel so incredibly shocked.

She's crying from the shock, from the sudden sharp stab of pain that runs through her when she looks Davina in the eyes again, sees the thin scar running down her cheek that's always reminded her of the sliver of the crescent moon, smells the lingering traces of kerosene on her skin and the stronger, sharper smell of the freesia perfume she watched her dab onto her temples every morning for thirty years.

It takes her back so vividly she almost feels as if she's underground once more. But the room is full of vividness and color, color that's not blood and sunlight that makes even the darkest of rooms feel alive.

"Annora," She breathes into her hair and Rosa lets out a shuddering scream of grief, a sob that starts off quiet and crescendos because no one has called her by her name in so long she'd forgotten, forgotten or blocked it away so she'd never have to remember it.

Annora died the day she wrapped up a chirping infant in a green silk shawl and vanished into the desert, never to be seen again. Or perhaps she died the day they dragged her underground to be buried alive-- she can't recollect what it's like to be bound to no one but herself because she's never been free and--

"Annora," Davina repeats and now the Dolorosa can hear her voice cracking along the edges like seams that have been pulled too tight for too long. "I thought I'd lost you."

She keens again. The sound seems to frighten them both into quieting. Rosa still sniffles, breathing heavily, and Davina is green around the eyes but they've stopped their tears.

"Darling--" She breathes, eyes wide. "You're alive."

"Yes." Rosa murmurs. "Yes, I am."

"What happened to you?" She breathes and Rosa feels a twinge of honor when Davina pulls her veil away from her face. "Annora, my little one."

"I'm the Dolorosa now." Rosa murmurs, not wanting to hear her name again, not willing to hear that name slipping over her tongue, tripping over her teeth. the sharpness and hiss of the syllables over her teeth or listen to the roundness of the word. Honor, that's all she hears. Honor, something she lost ages ago. "The Apostate Dolorosa, Davina. Not a Daughter. Not Annora.

God she sounds like a saccharine hero of a terrible romance novel. Next thing you know she's going to be swept off her feet by a rugged pirate and suitably ravished.

Well.

That's already happened so perhaps she's a saccharine heroine who's been hit in the head one too many times? Oh goodness.

"That's a terrible name," Davina sniffs, this time dismissively instead of sadly. "And I hardly see why you felt obligated to change your title of all things."

Davina tugs the veil off her face with what sounds very much like a dismissive sigh. Her face, when uncovered, looks far more worn and older than Rosa anticipated, her formerly glittering green eyes dull and surrounded by deep, dark circles. Her hair has grown past her waist now in large, impressive curls. It's the only thing about Davina that she really recognizes-- she looks like a woman
who's almost completely given up.

Rosa wants to ask her what happened because, well, she isn't the Davina she remembers. She doesn't look at all alive any more--

"Help me move him, Annora." She mutters, tossing her veil onto the couch where a pile of embroidery is sitting. Rosa's not entirely sure what the hell is going on because this is a knitting shop but, well, she supposes if it's Davina's she's allowed to do it if she owns the place. "And then we'll talk about this."

Oh for the love of all things holy. It's like she's eighteen again and spending every waking moment being lectured at how bad she is at her job, how useless she is, how ridiculously difficult she is to deal with.

Honestly. It's ridiculous. But she still kneels down and helps Davina pick up the unconscious man and carry him outside. She keeps up a trite, rambling tirade of complaints about local law enforcement as they shuffle out of the back door and leave him in the alley. Hearing her voice is like watching a ghost filter through her memories, raising up old, lost things that were never meant to be rediscovered.

She's glad to know the memories are still there, locked in old, dusty trunks and hidden from the eyes of the world but damnitall she wishes she didn't have to be reminded.

They leave him hidden beneath a pile of newspapers. Davina straightens and rearranges her hair before darting back inside. Rosa hesitates before stooping low to confirm that he is, in fact, unconscious and not dead. His pulse is strong and steady and she sends a quick prayer of thanks to whomever is up there listening.

"Annora, get inside!"

Rosa re-enters the store with an amount of reluctance she finds almost frightening. This isn't a conversation she ever thought she'd be having, not even in her wildest dreams or fiercest nightmares. She never prepared for this, sitting down with her old mentor and forced to explain herself. While Davina may be older and worn down around the edges, she's still the sharp-tonged, quick witted woman she always was and Rosa isn't eager to reacquaint herself with that.

There wasn't ever a way to win a fight with her. Screaming, crying, throwing things, behaving perfectly reasonably-- everything failed in the face of her constantly, calm assertion that she was Always Right.

But she wasn't always right. Rosa follows her back up the stairs to the sitting area, frowning. She wasn't always right because no one can ever have that. It would be a blessing to be omnipotent but there isn't a soul alive who can make that claim. Certainly not Davina, a woman who passed more than eighty years of her life underground.

They both sink into armchairs, Davina sitting straight and looking every inch the composed matron while Rosa sinks back, shoulders hunched and face turned towards the floor. God she hates this.

"So, Annora," She says, her voice warm but irritatingly condescending. "Care to explain yourself?"

She lifts her head, slowly, and stares. No, she's serious. Completely serious. Talking to her like she's twenty one and slept through her shift and nothing remotely important had occurred as a consequence. As if hundreds of people hadn't suffered and died in her son's name, as if she hadn't
been forced to watch as he was tortured and executed before her unwilling eyes, as if she hadn't sat there and watched as the rest of her little family was dragged off in chains, Leaona still screaming and clutching her dead lover's clothes--

"No." She murmurs, frowning at her hands. "I don't care to explain myself."

"...I see."

She sits up a little more and does her best to mimic Mindfang's forbidding glare. It can't be anywhere near as effective with the lack of a seven-pupiled eye and fangs like ivory knives but it has some of the desired effect. Davina shifts, anxiously, crossing and recrossing her legs. She fidgets with the pile of embroidery thread and silk beside her and finally, huffs and says:

"Well you must know what I think of your absurd behavior--"

"Absurd."

"Yes." She blinks, frowning. "What in the world would ever compel you to do something so incredibly foolish. Not to mention nonsensical--"

"He was my son, Davina." The Dolorosa says, her voice calm and so placid she's surprised. "And if you dare to defile his memory by speaking of him I'm going to ask you to accept my wrath as consequence."

"Annora."

"Don't you dare attempt to trivialize this." She snaps, frowning. "He was my child and there's nothing to me that can ever matter more--"

"Annora!" She gapes standing quickly. The Dolorosa doesn't try to move. She glares, her lips tightly sealed. The urge to snarl and throw the nearest blunt object at her head is, well, strong.

"You broke the most sacred of our laws," Davina hisses, looming over her and showing her teeth. Her skin is pale it's practically glowing but, well, Rosa has had a pirate at her throat and the threat of a whip on her back and god help her there's nothing more frightening than waking up with an angry Mistress at her back.

Perhaps not knowing that her Mistress wants to have sex with her would make it more frightening to sleep beside her. But either way Davina isn't the most frightening woman in the world any more.

"I know." Rosa murmurs, frowning. "But I did what was right, Davina."

"He was a red blood." She hisses, narrowing her eyes. "Do you know how much damage that creature could have done to your genetic pool--"

"Creature." At that, the Dolorosa does stand. She stands and shoves her, hard. "He wasn't a creature. He was my son."

"We aren't meant to have children for a reason Annora." Davina doesn't stumble back so much as she glides, gracefully, regaining her balance as if nothing at all had happened. "Consider yourself lucky we didn't get our hands on him first."

"Oh, yes, I consider myself to be so incredibly lucky to have WATCHED MY CHILD BE TORTURED AND EXECUTED FOR THE AMUSEMENT OF A CROWD--"
"I meant that consider yourself lucky your involvement with him is nothing more than speculation." Davina hisses and shoves her, hard, which isn't the most mature thing but Rosa supposes she did start it. Or, well, she would suppose if she weren't digging her fingernails into her arms in an attempt not to snap the bitch's neck like it's nothing more than an icicle.

"Or else we wouldn't be at all able to readmit you." She finishes, giving Rosa her best, most placating smile that always worked in the past but right now just isn't going to cut it.

"Readmit me?" Rosa snaps, staring. "Readmit me? As a member of the Order?"

"Yes of course, Annora, don't be stupid."

"I have absolutely no desire to be a Daughter. You can keep your-- your-- your--" What's something that's insulting enough? Damn. She can't think of anything. "DAMNIT DAVINA, YOU'VE ALWAYS RUINED MY LIFE."

"Excuse me?"

"WHY CAN'T YOU JUST STOP MAKING EVERYONE MISERABLE AND ADMIT THAT YOU'RE JUST AS TERRIBLE AS THE REST OF US!"

"I beg your pardon."

"Oh, don't try to act so high and mighty, you know you were just as angry and repressed as the rest of us. Spending all of your time passive-aggressively taking out your pent up sexual energy on us-- and-- and-- making hellish patrols just to make the rest of us suffer--"

"I did no such thing!"

There's a jangling in the background that Rosa dimly recognizes as the sound of someone entering the store. The need for discretion is, however, outweighed by the need to give Davina a piece of her mind. How many years of the passive-aggressive back and forth did she have to put up with, hmm? How many years before she was old enough and experienced enough to know what in fresh hell was going on? A lot of years. That's the only answer she can produce.

"Oh just admit that you used every opportunity you could to pull me into dark corners and make out with me! At least I'm proud of having raised that child, not to mention having saved his life!"

"Ahem."

They both turn, quickly. Davina, upon realizing that she is, in fact, in the company of a non-Daughter, gasps and flails to cover her face.

"For fuck's sake, Davina," Rosa hisses as she finds her shawl being yanked from her throat. "Grow a pair."

"Annora."

Mindfang is... Well... She's... Well-- She's... There aren't words for the exact expression on her face. Furious? No, no she's smiling a little. Amused? No, not really, she's frowning. Angry? No, not angry--

"Am I interrupting anything, Pet?" Mindfang murmurs, extending an arm. Rosa is nuzzling close to her before she has the chance to fully quantify what's occurring.
"Annora!"

"If you don’t get me away from this woman immediately I might break her face in." Rosa whispers into her Mistress's ear. Mindfang’s body language doesn't change whatsoever, but the hand on her shoulder tightens.

"Annora, get over here immediately and stop disgracing me." Davina hisses and a hand curls around her wrist. Her nails are far less well-groomed than Mindfang's, or perhaps they're just longer because they hurt and she lets out a sharp whimper.

Mindfang responds with a vicious snarl. Rosa's quite upset that she's not wearing something more sheer because seeing the color from her face would be the best thing ever.

"Take your hands off of her or so help me god you will find yourself without them."

"You are threatening a Daughter of the Order--"

"No shit. I didn't guess by the tacky veil and the fact that you look like you have a stick up your ass." Mindfang is looming now and Rosa's glad to see that yes, she was correct in assuming that Mindfang out-intimidates Davina.

"I must insist you remove your hands from her immediately." Davina hisses, narrowing her eyes. "I don't know who you think you are but I will have you brought up on charges--"

Mindfang shoves Rosa behind her. Rosa clings to her shoulders and presses her face into Mindfang’s back. She might be a hindrance, yes, but Mindfang makes no move to push her away.

"I am the Marquise of the Eighth Ward," Mindfang growls and Rosa stares as she notices Mindfang’s ears fold flat against her head with a quiet tinkling of earrings. "I have every right to behave as I wish. Darling, do you want me to listen to this woman?"

"No." She mumbles, curling her fingers into the fabric of her jacket, feeling absolutely pathetic. She should be the one saying things, be the one to snarl at her and demand that Davina treat her like the woman she is, ordering her to show some respect. But, well, it's far easier to allow Mindfang to do it.

"I don't know what in the hell is going on between the two of you but I don't really give a fuck, so here's how this is going to play out-- I'm going to go downstairs with her and we're going to look at piece of dead sheep and you're going to shut your face and pretend you don't know either of us in anything other than a professional capacity."

"Annora, you can't honestly go with this woman--"

"You seem to think I'm not above throwing you down a flight of stairs and making it look like you tripped over your cat. Let me clear this up for you-- I'm not."

With that she reaches out and pulls Rosa's shawl off of Davina's head, ignoring her outraged growl. Mindfang turns on her heel with something akin to a repressed screech of rage and shoves Rosa towards the stairs. The Dolorosa is all too happy to race down them.

She glances back only long enough to see Davina's mouth set in a hard line and her eyes narrowed behind her now replaced veil. It's a look that would have terrified her twenty years ago, but now, with Mindfang at her back-- well--

Without a second thought, she extends an arm and makes an incredibly rude hand gesture.
They retreat to a part of the store that's somewhat sheltered from the vantage of the sitting area above, in between a pair of shelves that hold yarn ranging from turquoise to ultramarine yarn. Mindfang looks tense in every way possible, her jaw tight and twitching.

"Are you alright?" She asks, immediately, reaching out and curling her hands around her jaw. "Do I need to kill her."

"No." Rosa breathes, closing her eyes and all but collapsing into the scent of her perfume. "No, I'm fine. Thank you, Mistress."

They fall silent for a few moments, Rosa allowing her heart rate to calm before attempting to function as a normal being should.

"Annora?" Mindfang asks, softly, her voice curling around the word in a way that makes Rosa shiver. She presses her face into Mindfang's shoulder and lets out a soft whine and Mindfang says her name again, Annora, and it sounds like a caress but she hates it all the same.

"Don't." She begs, sniffing in a way that's decidedly un-ladylike. "Please don't.

"Is that your name?" She asks, softly, and Rosa feels fingers curl into her hair then trace along the base of her horn. It forces her to relax, almost, reminding her to breathe as she takes in a sharp gasp of pleasure.

Rosa nods against her. She's still shaking and every time she trembles Mindfang pulls her a little closer.

"It's a nice name." Mindfang says, more than a little lamely. It's not enough to make her laugh, however, even as pathetically desperate as it is. "It suits you, Pet."

"No it doesn't. I'm not honorable-- I'm terrible."

"Don't say that." Mindfang snaps. "Don't you ever say that. If you're terrible, I'm hopeless."

For the second time in an hour, she's crying into someone else's arms. Except this time she's warm and safe, comforted by the feel of cold hands against the back of her neck and a cozy warmth that wool brings. Mindfang isn't cozy not at all, but to Rosa she's just right, just perfect, just--

"Don't cry, Rosa." Mindfang murmurs, her voice low and rumbling. "I don't want you to cry. I don't like it when you cry, Pet."

"Please don't let me go." She hiccups. "Don't. I can't go back, I can't."

Mindfang has nothing to say to that. Nothing at all. She kisses her on her forehead and holds her tightly. There aren't words for the feeling that's overwhelming her. Gratitude covers the scantest edges of it. Affection is coloring it as well, but there's something stronger, something deeper that she can't really identify. It's surprising how much better it feels to be in Mindfang's arms, curled close to a woman she's known for a scant few months instead of wrapped in Davina's embrace, close to a woman who was her closest confidante for three decades.

"I won't let anyone have you." Mindfang mutters when the worst of Rosa's tears subside. "If I wouldn't let a shop assistant dress you why in the world would I allow anyone to take you from me?"
Rosa shrugs. It's difficult given how tightly Mindfang is wrapped around her, but the point of the gesture seems to be conveyed.

"Come along, Pet." Mindfang soothes, shifting away slightly so she can look in her eyes. "Are we okay?"

She sniffs. Mindfang hands her a handkerchief without needing to be asked. It's lacy, again, but Rosa takes it without comment and presses it to her face. "No," she says and it's muffled by the fabric but at least she can have a half minute more of crying. "No, I'm not."

"...Are you ever going to be okay?" Mindfang asks in a small voice, a small pathetic voice that makes her sound like a thirteen year old girl, scared in the face of a decision so big she can't even begin to fathom it. It makes Rosa start crying once again and Mindfang keens and pulls her close once again.

"I don't know. I-- I don't think I have the right to."

There isn't much either of them can say to that. Rosa wants to retract the statement but knows it's a lie and *damn it all* she doesn't want to be a liar. Mindfang, it seems, has nothing to say to that. But she takes her and squeezes it and for a moment the weight of the world is lifted a little. For a few seconds they aren't Mistress and woebegone slave-- they're a pair of women lost and alone, save for one another.

"Will it help if I buy you an obscene quantity of yarn?" Mindfang finally asks, trying for a shaky laugh that only manages to dissolve into nervous tittering. "I don't like it when you're upset, Pet. It upsets me."

"Oh, well, my apologies."

"Not playing misery poker, don't give me any sass." Mindfang mutters, squeezing her a final time before letting her go and stepping away. "C'mon. Show me something I don't know about dead pieces of sheep that makes knitting fun."

Rosa manages a successful laugh, at that. She only starts sniffling again at the end, but manages to maintain her smile. Mindfang makes a beeline for the expanse of blue yarn and Rosa can tell she's already searching for her blood color. It's an instinct even she can't hide; the first thing she noticed when stepping into the store was a skein of gray-green yarn that was as soft as a cloud, a beautiful jade that was spun from a gorgeous merino wool that she'd be more than happy to make a nest out of.

Mindfang's running her hands over the skeins of yarn and doesn't seem at all impressed. "So what's the big deal, huh?" Mindfang mutters, frowning. She's clearly underwhelmed and Rosa rolls her eyes. She's almost comical, sometimes, in how little she considers things before she acts. Or perhaps she's doing this in a misguided attempt to make Rosa cheer up. Either way she's being silly.

Rosa reaches out and tugs gently at her wrist. Mindfang's hand is dragged towards her with remarkable hesitation. She's staring at Rosa's fingers, absolutely perplexed like she has no idea who the hell is touching her. But she smirks and Rosa has to smile back.

Her gloves are, as always, sleek and expensive. She's never paid too much attention to them before, save for the shivers that trace up and down her spin whenever her Mistress's covered fingertips press to her face, skin just warm enough beneath the fabric to make the leather feel like it's molten, trailing against her cheekbone with a wake of delayed sensation raised by the tug of leather on skin.
Mindfang has returned to studying the yarn; in her free hand she's holding a tightly wound ball of silken cashmere dyed a brilliant blue. It's a little too bright to be at all close to her blood color but it's a shade that looks lovely against the black wool of her coat all the same.

Rosa finds the sapphire button that fastens her glove around her wrist with a few moments of consternated searching. How in the world does she not know how to remove her own mistress’s gloves? This is pathetic. She undoes the button as delicately as she can, perfectly aware that Mindfang's gloves are probably close to priceless. When the pads of her fingers brush against the unguarded skin of Mindfang's inner wrist she starts away, eyes wide with shock. But she doesn't pull away. Her hand goes limp in Rosa's grasp, almost as if it's been suddenly separated from the rest of her. Rosa slides the glove off of her hand with a fluidity that seems to surprise them both. Mindfang's hands are, of course, as delicate as they always are, skin soft and nails remarkably well-groomed for-- well-- a pirate.

She curls her fingers around Mindfang's own. They're frozen. She squeezes them in a gesture of mother's worry she can't fully suppress. Mindfang shivers and lets out a sound that can really only be described as a mewl. "You should really consider some nice, wooly mittens," Rosa mutters.

"Yeah, well, I'll take my nice soft leather over this weird ass wool anyway--"

Rosa rolls her eyes and buries her bare hand into the yarn. Mindfang gasps.

"Holy shit what is this magic." Mindfang hisses in one breath. "Rosa I need this in my life won't you make me things please I will have sex with you."

"You already want to have sex with me, that's not much of an inducement." Rosa giggles as a ball of yarn is pushed against her cheeks. "That's cashmere, Mistress."

"Yeah, well, we're buying it. We're buying it, and that, and that and-- shit what else do you need? Needles? Yeah, those. We're getting those."

They end up wandering around most of the store. Whenever Davina spots them, Mindfang makes a point of leaning in and kissing her, wrapping a pair of arms around her waist.

"Kiss me harder and bite my lip a little." Rosa hisses as they make it through a section of purple yarn. "If you're trying to make her jealous you won't be able to do it by just flirting a little."

"Hot damn I think you might have aggression issues." Mindfang pulls her into another corner and shoves her into a shelf, sinking her teeth into her neck and humming loudly. "Rosa, what's wrong?"

"Do you ever hate someone so much you just want to rip their throat out?"

"I do have a kismesis."

"No. She thinks she's better than me because she's older than me and is higher ranking than me. And she called my baby--"

Rosa's voice catches. "My baby--"

"No, no, darling, don't go there-- please."

Rosa leans her head against Mindfang's arm and closes her eyes, letting herself relax into her familiar presence. Davina's watching them from the elevated sitting area and Rosa knows it but, well--

"Can we leave?" She asks, softly, tugging at Mindfang's coat. Mindfang turns and nods.
"Only after we buy a ridiculous quantity of wool just to piss off your frenemy up there. You are going to tell me about this over lunch, right?"

"...Depends on how much wool we're talking about."

* * *

Davina is less than happy to sell them a few hundred dollars’ worth of yarn. For a woman making what is, perhaps, the biggest sale of her year, she's shockingly surly. Rosa can't exactly blame her but, well--

"I don't think we need six pounds of blue yarn." Rosa says with a laugh as she watching Mindfang struggle to carry the package out of the shop.

"Yes we do." Mindfang grumbles as they make their way down the street. "We need it for... blankets. And, uh, sweaters. And scarves. And mittens."

"And who is going to be making all of these things?"

"...I'm bought you green things too?" Mindfang pleads, giving her a wicked smile when Rosa fails to seem pleased. "C'mon. I better feed you before you stop being able to photosynthesize."

"Now I know you're making references to my being a plant and I don't see the correlation when you know for a fact I lived underground for almost thirty years."

"And it was hardly necessary to buy out the majority of blue yarn in the store just to anger my ex-Sister."

"More like ex-girlfriend." Mindfang mutters and there's a dark tone in her voice that makes Rosa stop and stare at her, incredulously.

"Mistress, are you insinuating anything?"

"No. I never do that. I never sinuate anything, ever, let alone insinuate anything." Mindfang frowns and shows the fronts of her fangs, "And I don't like the idea of you--"

"What part about I'm such a virgin it took me a full twenty four hours to understand what oral sex was when you propositioned me don't you understand?"

"Whoa, whoa, Pet. Let's dial it back." Mindfang stares, but she's smirking all the same. "I didn't know you had figured that out yet."

"I'm naive, not stupid." Rosa mutters, glowering. "And we weren't dating."

"Then what the fuck would you call whatever the hell was going on up there?"

"Basically," Rosa mutters, rolling her eyes, "She wanted to sleep with me. But we can't do that, of course--"

"Of course."

"So she would do her best to get me alone and try to convince me to make out with her."

"Did that work?"

"Oh, of course. Because if I didn't she'd turn me in and I'd be executed." They turn a corner and Mindfang quickly ushers her to the other side of the street to avoid an oncoming crowd."But I will
admit to you, it wasn't as if I was entirely unwilling. She was pretty then."

"First-- First-- that's the bitchiest thing I've ever heard you say--"

"She did not age well." Rosa mutters, sniffing haughtily.

"Yeah, whatever. Second, does that mean that if I want to have sex with you I just have to call the cops?"

"I suppose. But it might kill the mood to have us both arrested and promptly executed." Rosa murmurs, sighing melodramatically. "If you're going to deflower me I'd really rather not have it end up in a jail cell."

"I don't like the sound of that 'if' right there." Mindfang purrs, and she wraps an arm around Rosa's waist. She stops a door that has a name written in it in what's clearly a foreign language. "Come on, darling, let's argue about sex over a late lunch."

* * *

It's a darling little restaurant, or, well, what the Dolorosa assumes is a darling little restaurant since she's never been in one before. It's a nice place with white tablecloths and white plates and silverware that gleams in the dim light of the afternoon sun streaming in through a few giant windows.

Mindfang greets the man at the podium by name, smiling widely. Rosa's not entirely surprised because, well, Mindfang seems to know everyone.

They're taken to a back room with a single table and a pair of huge windows. It's a nice little room and, well, there's enough room for all of their yarn. Mindfang helps her into one of the chairs--unnecessary, but appreciated.

Mindfang orders lunch without waiting to be offered a menu. Rosa, once again, fails to be shocked. They make small talk until the food appears, Mindfang asking her questions that are pointedly bland. She asks for her favorite color at least eight different times, and the weather is discussed in great detail. She's clearly going out of her way not to ask something and Rosa's all too sure she knows what that something actually is.

If curiosity is a killer, Mindfang is its number one victim. That woman has more books on board her ship than should be legal and spends more time writing than can even be possible. Placing a pair of Daughters in front of her and then shoving one of them back into her arms is more or less like offering to buy her a dictionary of an undiscovered language and then telling her she has to wait to read it.

It's only when a pot of coffee appears and the door is finally shut for good that Mindfang turns in her chair, narrows her eyes and goes in for the kill.

"So, Pet..." She murmurs, her voice like liquid arousal. Mindfang hooks her leg around her chair and tugs it close. "I want to talk to you--"

"I am taking you into confidence." Rosa murmurs, almost shocked at the audacity of her own words. Mindfang doesn't react, though, even though she flinches in anticipation of negative reaction from her mistress.

Mindfang lets out a quiet hum and reaches out, taking her hand. She's not wearing her gloves and the contact is almost frightening in the intensity. The feeling of her fingertips, soft and smooth against the
harsh skin of her wrist is like brushing a hand against an exposed wire, a tingling so fierce she can barely remember where her own skin begins.

"Not a word of this will leave this table." Mindfang says, her voice low. "I give you my word."

"I mean it," Rosa persists, frowning. "This is-- this is sacred information. If anyone finds out I've spoken to you about this, I will be killed."

Still, no reaction. No flare of temper, no chastisement, no anger. She nodes and her face looks incredibly serious. "I understand completely."

"Don't you even think about writing this down to preserve for future generations to find."

"I--" Mindfang starts to protest this, but manages to push down her sudden flare of temper. "I won't. I promise, Miss Dolorosa. I stake my honor on it."

Rosa gives her a tight smile and drops the hem of the linen tablecloth. She begins to fidget with the silverware instead, staring starkly at her empty wineglass. She wants to summon over their waiter and get something a little stronger to drink than weak Earl Gray, but-- well--

Mindfang's call.

"Rosa," Mindfang says, moving a little closer, until their shoulders are touching. They're angled in towards each other now, and in the silhouette of the window Mindfang almost looks like a princess, regal and calm. But her hands are calloused and so unusually warm Rosa almost thinks she's absorbed some of the bright seaside sun. "Rosa, I will not force you to do this. You don't have to tell me anything."

"You deserve to know. You--" Rosa bites her tongue and stares at the ceiling, trying to hold back her thoughts. It's a struggle, and she does her best to make her brain behave by staring at the crystals dangling from the chandelier. "--You haven't kept anything from me."

"I--"

"I may not be your closest confidante, but you have been kind to me and given me far more discretion than any other woman in my place would merit. And I am not about to reject your kindness by not sharing my world with you."

She swallows, dryly, and Mindfang passes her a coffee cup. Rosa curls her fingers around it and it's warm and perfect.

"How much do you know?" Rosa asks, quietly, staring up at Mindfang.

"...You raised the Signless Sufferer. The rumor mill has it you were one of the Sisters, tasked with tending the Mother Grub."

"Daughter." The Dolorosa says, softly, then frowns. "I was a Daughter of the Order of Penumbra."

Mindfang, in a gesture that hits like a bat upside the head, visibly blanches, straightening and giving Rosa a scandalized stare.

"You knew that, Mistress. You had to." She sniffs, narrowing her eyes and huffing loudly. Mindfang wrinkles her nose and shivers a little bit.

"Please, Rosa," Mindfang mutters, slouching a little. "Can't we start at the beginning and work up to
the whole baby stealing thing?"

"I think it's important to start with the fact that it's almost impossible for members of my blood caste to make it to adolescence," Rosa admits, stirring her coffee a little more frantically than is strictly necessary. Mindfang hears each clink of metal on porcelain with a slight wince.

She stops and then does her best not to immediately begin tapping her feet on the ground. She's devastatingly anxious, her face feeling like it was, well, frozen and then thawed, and her breath coming in with little, sharp gasps when she thinks too hard about it.

"If the Sisters find a jade blooded newborn, they are hunted down. The only way any of us survived is by somehow managing to hide."

"If you're so rare to begin with, why do they--"

"Because each one of use was raised by the mother grub." Rosa says, with a huge sigh. Mindfang reacts to the news with the torpor of a rabid raccoon being dropped into a puddle, spilling her tea all over the white tablecloth. Neither of them, however, moves to clean it up.

"You were what." She hisses, glancing anxiously over her shoulder. It's almost comical to watch her panic; normally Rosa's overcome by social anxiety while Mindfang laughs in the face of convention.

It's enjoyable, actually. Watching her viscerally react to the statement as if she's been punched in the stomach. She can't process the information and looks like a child who's just been informed that gravity is what's keeping them from flying. She's never thought of her as being particularly spiritual but, apparently, tradition runs deep.

"My lusus was the Mother Grub." Rosa repeats, a little more firmly. "And I'm sure you understand the implications of that."

"...Other than the fact that my upbringing is demanding that I slap you for blaspheming, not particularly. I was brought up in a very religious household, you know." Mindfang makes a gesture and Rosa instinctively recognizes it as a blessing. She may have never made it to one of the official ceremonies or festivals but she's cognizant enough of her Order's importance in her Culture. While they may be her Sisters, to the rest of the planet she is a Daughter, a Daughter of the Penumbra. The only way she should have been remembered was as an anonymous figure draped in a black lace veil, lantern stretched out before her to light the way of the lost ones.

"Each time a member of the jade caste makes it to adolescence, almost an entire generation of our people is lost." Rosa shrugs. She gives up on trying not to fidget because she feels as if her skull is about to rupture if she doesn't do something. Without allowing herself to react, "So the Sisters avoid it at all costs."

"That's horrible."

Rosa shrugs. She might be betraying Order but she's hardly about to defame it. Loyalty runs deep when it's quite literally bred into your bones. "It's how it must be. When I was--"

She breaks off with a shaky breath. "When I was a Sisters there were only eleven of us alive."

"Eleven?"

"There are only six sisters in the caverns at a time; our hierarchy is determined by age. When a new
"Sister comes along, the eldest is freed from her responsibilities and allowed to retire to the surface, with... limitations."

"Oh, *that* doesn't sound ominous."

"It's not quite that bad. Veiled, at all times, wearing black, doing nothing to disgrace the Sisterhood, not divulging secrets and, of course, assisting the Empire in any way it requests."

"...So your friend back there?"

"She was second in command when I was a young woman. As the fourth in command she was my mentor when I first went underground." Rosa says, softly, refusing to admit that she has no idea what havoc her exit caused in such a carefully structured hierarchy. "I'm assuming that she was promoted from Orthodox Cardinal to Reverend Superior and was, eventually, released with blessings."

"You're still a young girl." Mindfang mutters into her coffee cup, huffing a little. "Honestly."

"So, as you can imagine, I wasn’t exactly a... welcome presence. But the Sisterhood can't afford to disrupt the system in any way-- allowing two Jade blooded grubs to ascend would completely destroy our species. And so, of course," Rosa swallows and forces herself to make eye contact. "She expects me to return underground."

"...Ah. I see."

"Yes." What else can she say?"

"Do you *want* to go?"

"You mean go back to live miles underground in a small, enclosed society completely cut off from the rest of the world without access to information or resources, expected to spend every day of my life emotionlessly slaughtering children?"

That earns her a smile.

"Of course I prefer that over waking up every morning to the open ocean with wind in my hair and the entire world laid out before me. And, well, far less blood on my hands."

"Yeah, what the fuck was that about dead kids?"

"You *must* know that."

"Yeah, but culling and slaughtering is different."

"Culling, slaughtering-- it's the same when you come down to doing it. A grub is ostracized by his peers? Killed. Not friendly enough? Killed. Too friendly? Killed. Too angry, not angry enough, too big, too small, too brightly colored, too dull, legs too sharp, legs not sharp enough, too curious, not curious enough--"

"How does anyone make it out alive?"

"Mostly by being intelligent enough to hide or not attract attention." Rosa can't help but smile. "Or in some cases, putting up a good enough fight. You wouldn't believe how many blood colors are actually *common* in larval age but fail to meet expectations. Or, well, aren't intelligent enough to escape the underground predators. Or swim. Or avoid fire."

"...Mine?"
"Oh, heavens no. It's rather hard to kill newborns who have the unbridled psychic power to turn your weapon against you. We hunt certain blood colors more and allow others more leniency." She says, sighing. "It's despicable, but, well, necessary. We have to do what we need to in order to survive as a species. And, well, if that means that the weakest must die, then the weakest must die. Any imperfections will only continue to pollute the genetic slurry and can never be corrected."

"Hail her Imperious Condescension and her Exalted Heiress." Mindfang says, wryly, crossing her legs. "And the Grand Highblood in all his infinite wisdom."

"Of course."

"So, you live underground killing children for a few decades and get drunk in your free time, have some orgies?"

Rosa wants to laugh. She really does. But she can't. "No. Hardly."

"That was sarcasm." Mindfang says, but she smiles and wraps an arm around Rosa, pulling her closer. She smells like jasmine perfume, of course, and seawater and she's not ashamed to admit to feeling comforted by it. The smell of coffee, rich and vibrant, dances around her in a haze and when she closes her eyes all she can think of is comfort and home. It's a wonderful feeling, an absolutely wonderful feeling. She can still feel the raw patches of skin burning on her neck and wrists and the constant low-grade pulse of anxiety is still there but she'll be damned if she'd prefer to be underground. There's sunlight streaming in from the windows behind them and if she tries her hardest she can see the waves cresting by the docks.

It's heaven. Slavery is heaven; that's how she knows she's blessed to have gotten away. But she would be lying to say that she doesn't miss the majesty of it all sometimes. The feeling of knowing she was contributing to society, the feeling of knowing she was an active part of her people's culture instead of simply another citizen.

Rosa nuzzles closer, pressing her face into her Mistress's neck. Mindfang trills and shivers. It's enough to make her giggle, loudly.

Mindfang is looking at her curiously, her eyebrows arched down and her lower lip trapped between her fangs.

"We were tasked with keeping the flame of the Empire alive." She mutters. It's a legend, of course. That's what they say if they're asked, above or below ground. A legend and nothing more. And perhaps that's true; she can't deny the fact that no one knows where the fire started.

But she does know that she grew up hearing stories of that little flame, seeing paintings hanging on white walls depicting the first Empress of the nation standing, small yet brave and noble looking before a group of eleven others-- one of them lying dead in her lover's arms-- while she confronted a best of immeasurable proportions, nothing but a small fire separating girl and beast.

Mindfang hasn't said a word. Rosa glances at her and she's gone almost sheet white, which is impressive given the normal blue gray tint of her skin.

"Mistress?" She murmurs, frowning and glancing her over. "Are you quite alright?"

"You just told me our nation's oldest fairy tale is not only true but apparently alive and well." Mindfang says and her words are accompanied by a shaky laugh. She polishes off her previously untouched glass of brandy in a single swallow. "Fuck all Rosa that's not something you just tell a woman."
"I don't think it's particularly evident of anything other than a healthy respect for tradition." Rosa says with a shrug, trying to look dismissive because the hungry fire that's been stoked in the back of Mindfang's eyes is almost too much to consider. Her curiosity is going to burn her alive one day. "You know the Scripture, I presume? In the beginning, there were Twelve..."

And before she can finish her sentence her voice has given away to Mindfang's, voice reciting the age old words like a hand slipping over freshly polished brass. She speaks with the solemnity of the ancients, voice seeming to reverberate even in the coziness of the room.

==> BEGIN INTERMISSION 1
or in which the universe was created.

Chapter Summary

Alternian Creation Myth: or, INTERMISSION ONE.

even the ancestors must have had ancestors, after all. and who other than an infamously long-winded storyteller would be fit to tell that tale? (otherwise known as: pity Rosa for bringing the subject up).

NOTE: for those who don't enjoy reading the text off the images, there is a plain-text version of the creation myth just below the pictures; it's a little different from the images, but nothing major.

Chapter Notes

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU to the wonderful tyrianCyclostomes for illustrating this chapter for me! She donated so much of her time and talent to assist me in making this beautiful and I'm eternally grateful <3 LOOK AT HOW BEAUTIFUL IT IS!!!

Also thanks to you all for waiting so long-- I wanted to try something with this to make it unique and I really like how it turned out! The next text chapter should be out by the weekend-- long enough for you all to reacquaint yourselves with what the hell is going on in this story, if you wish.

You're all amazing <3
The Darkest Gods saw it was so. But in Their infinite wisdom they remained apart, trusting the Universe to serve its Purpose. For they foresaw there was Hope.

And it was so.

For in the aftermath of the Universe's First Destruction, there were Twelve to escape the carnage, fleeing in the wake of His angelic wrath. They were all that remained of Our Great Empire, the last vestige of life in a swarm of fire.

And so it came to pass that they travelled long in search of the Promised Land foreseen by one of Their number. While Their path was hard and fraught with sorrow but Their fight for survival kept them on a steady course.

Their faith was rewarded with the finding of a place of Solace, a land that was barren and yet familiar, a planet full of nothing and yet laden with opportunity. While the terrain was dead and the sun was unyielding fire. They lived and called it Home.
landed and called it home.
Its sole Denizen was the inhabitant and steadfast ruler of a vast ocean of black waters, unlit by the harshness of the great sun above.

The Twelve were unsure of how to proceed in the face of its great Adversity and discord sowed disharmony within their number.
But with time One stepped forward and by virtue of His steadfastness and passion was named leader.

He guided the Twelve into the depths of the caves into the heart of their yet Unborn Empire.

And thereupon They stood and faced the vast denizen that already called this planet Home.
And it spoke thusly, proclaiming:

“I shall not allow my land to be broken by the vast dreams of others, nor the corruption of nature to take its force.”

“My life is protected by the glow of this single flame, a light that has prevailed through centuries of destruction and the majesty of Angelic Hosts.”

“Anyone who dares to challenge me must show themselves Worthy of my Regard and Trust.”
The voice of the Behemoth rung out in the cave low and true, and, alas, imperceptible to all yet one. And the one who heard and was full of the truth of its words stepped forward and said:

“I will give my word to preserve your flame if you allow us solace here.”

And the Behemoth shifted back and
smiled with her thousand eyes and ten thousand teeth. Yet she remained unquailing in the face of certain adversity.

She reached out and placed her hands on her monstrous face and smiled with bright tyrian eyes full of life and repeated: ‘I promise’

And the best bowed her monstrous head and told her: “In return for your covenant I will protect you and your daughters for all of my days, until my land ceases to be.”

And it was so.
She tasked one of her companions, the most generous with her time yet most steadfast in her convictions to tend to the creature's fire, to preserve both the flame and her legend.

And so it came to pass...

that She and her Descendants remained in the cave to protect the progenitor of their species, a single orb salvaged from the wreck of their home.

Lanterns lit by the Flame of the BEHEMOTH lit their path in the darkness until their souls became one with the flame and they glowed with an Eternal Light.
And they were each known as a Daughter of the Order of Penumbra, the women who stalked the edges of darkness with their ever shining light. And so they brought the next generations of Our Empire into the world, sheltering them until they were of age to survive.

Then, to keep with the covenant made with their GREAT PROTECTOR, the children were taken to another home—a planet just outside of their Home’s orbit—and allowed to fight so that only the greatest could survive.
And it came to pass that the Twelve became legion. Their colors bleeding out into a rainbow until there was no way to discern who their True Descendants were.

And yet the BEHEMOTH always knew. Keeping Her promise to preserve the Heiresses of Her homeland.

Only one of the Twelve was lost. His memories and his Colors falling into darkness as he isolated himself from his companions. Forever mourning his past mistakes and refusing the comfort of his fellows.

Yet it was said that one day he would come to see the error of his ways and understand the forgiveness of his compatriots and once more rejoin them at the moment that all Twelve live again.

And so it shall come to pass.
And she in turn heeded the advisement of both the Delegate who served as the scion of the seadwellers and the Wayfarer who had kept their journey on a steady course.

Both men loved her with a passion that would not be extinguished and both would, in time, lead them to fall at the hands of the other.
The new land's culture was feebly overseen by the Minister who preached a gospel of understanding that never took root.

While his love was deep he lacked the conviction of change and was fated to fail.
And the technologies and nature of the land were cultivated by the two who were considered as one, partners in everything save affection.

While their love for one another was deep, his love was reserved for the maiden he lost at the hands of the Scriptor and hers was reserved for her dreams of the Lost One.

And it came to pass that the two of them helped found an empire, forever guided by the wisdom of the First Empress.
While the one who Saw the most yet was able to See the least declared herself Legislacerator and did her best to police the burgeoning planet.

Yet the antagonism and inducements brought to her by the presence of the Grand Highblood meant she would always fall short of her goal.

And so it came to pass that each was to prove their own undoing, slaying one another through whispered threats behind closed doors and the vengences of old awakened anew.
And so it came to pass that the Twelve were lost, slain by lost love or by their virtues until only three remained:

The EMPRESS, with Her indomitable spirit shattered by the loss of the men who guided her.

The Daughter who was assumed to be lost, life given to sustain the future of her race

And the Scriptor who watched over it all, never moving to comfort her the friends of the fallen.
And it came to be that the First Empress fell at her Heiress’s hands, as was dictated by Fate.

And the Daughter passed her lantern into the another of her own blood in order take up the mantle of colorless death and find everlasting peace in his embrace.
Then only one remained to remember the truth. The origin of our great Planet, the land we have been gifted.

And I, the Scriptor, the last of the Twelve. use my last pages to make accord of this tale...

That one day my Descendants may know of how it came to pass that, perhaps, they may learn from their Ancestor’s folly and find happiness.
And I assert that this tale is the Truth, the one Sincere Account of these occurrences over the course of my myriad sojourns.

And if there has ever been One Good Deed done in my eight lifetimes, may it be remembered as this.

El Fin.
In the Beginning there was nothing. What there once was had been lost to the Void, Life and Light absorbed into the darkness of the Furthest Ring. There was once Something but it was gone and all was Lost.

The Darkest Gods saw it was so. But in Their infinite wisdom they remained apart, trusting the Universe to serve its Purpose. For they foresaw there was Hope. And it was so.

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And they were each known as the a Daughter of the order of Penumbra, the women who stalked the edges of darkness with their ever shining light. And so they brought the next generations of Our Empire into the world, sheltering them until they were of age to survive. Then, to keep with the covenant made with their Great Protector, the children were taken to another home—a planet just outside of their Home’s orbit—and allowed to fight so that only the greatest could survive.

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And the technologies and nature of the land were cultivated by the two who were considered as one, partners in everything save affection. While their love for one another was deep, his love was reserved for the maiden he lost at the hands of the Scriptor and hers was reserved for her dreams of the Lost One. And it came to pass that the two of them helped found an empire, forever guided by the wisdom of the First Empress.

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And so it came that the Twelve were lost, slain by lost love or by their virtues until only three remained, the Empress with Her indomitable spirit shattered by the loss of the men who guided her, the Daughter who was assumed to be lost, life surrendered to preserve the fate of her race and the Scriptor. And it came to be that the First Empress fell at her Heiress’s hands, as was dictated by Fate and the Daughter passed her lantern to a Daughter of her own blood in order take up the mantle of colorless death and find everlasting peace in his embrace.

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Then only one remained to remember the truth. The origin of our great Planet, the land we have been gifted. And I, the Scriptor, the last of the Twelve, use my last pages to make accord of this tale, that one day my Descendants may know of how it came to pass.

* * *

And I assert that this tale is the Truth, the one Sincere Account of these instances. And if there has ever been One Good Deed done in my eight lifetimes, may it be remembered as this.
or, in which we finally get to the plot already

Chapter Summary

Lunch takes a turn for the worse, Mindfang employs frowned upon behavior to get out of having to deal with Rosa crying and Dualscar's accent makes an appearance.

also known as: see this is why we should all just stay at home on land.

Chapter Notes

okay finals are done, I finally started my summer job and moved to my summer housing and I'm starting to get my life back together. so here's a fifty page chapter to make up for it.

"You have a good voice for oration," Rosa remarks, because she's not entirely sure how one responds to their companion rattling off the first book of Scripture without a single missed syllable. "If our lectern had a voice like yours, I might have attended services."

Mindfang snorts a little, raising her eyebrows. She stirs more sugar into her coffee, tastes it and then flinches. They make eye contact over the table and Rosa feels a hand brush against her wrist beneath the tablecloth. She shivers from the base of her skull down to the small of her back and Mindfang gives her a wicked smile. She's pleased with the compliment.

"Thank you. You don't even want to know how many hours I had to spend memorizing that while I was in primary school. I'm glad it finally came in use."

Mindfang's thumb moves across the back of her hand, stroking her. Rosa shivers and shifts towards her just enough that their thighs brush together. It's an entirely different feeling now that they're both fully clothed, the warmth of Mindfang's heavy blue linen dress brushing against the silk of Rosa's stockings instead of against the bare skin of her thigh. It's somehow more intimate knowing they're separated.

"You do realize I'm rather familiar with the text, don't you?" Rosa asks, more than a little amused at the apparent pride Mindfang has in being able to recite vast passages of scripture verbatim. "I was a Daughter after all, we do have copies of the original texts."

"You have what?" Mindfang nearly loses her coffee cup to the floor. She manages to catch it with a minimal amount of liquid sloshing onto the fine linen tablecloth. Rosa blots it with her napkin and deftly refills her cup, pouring coffee into it with a curve of her wrist and adding just enough honey and milk to make it the color of burnt sugar.

Mindfang eyes her a little narrowly but raises an eyebrow and

"The original texts? The, um, books the Scriptures were originally written in? They're quite lovely, very nice penmanship. Lovely illumination, too, really quite nice. A little melodramatic at parts, and
her spelling was haphazard at best but, well, she was--"

Rosa pauses to sip from her glass and almost wishes it was spiked because talking about this makes her so horribly nervous. Mindfang waits with as much patience as Mindfang is capable of, tapping her fingernails on the tabletop in a staccato beat.

Her rings shine in the afternoon sun. Rosa examines them to avoid thinking about her previous career. She blinks down at the symbol engraved on Mindfang's signet ring, a blackened sign etched into the silver. It's oddly familiar, a single stroke away from becoming her own--

No. No she doesn't want to think about that. She has no symbol, no status and she gave that up a long, long time ago. Think about Mindfang, think about that 'M'--

"Have I lost you, Pet?" Mindfang murmurs, smiling with a teasing curve of her lips. Her fangs show just a little in the light. She doesn't like that Rosa's attention has shifted away from her, eyes narrowing ever-so-slightly to convey her displeasure.

"She was a very talented young woman." Rosa finishes, lamely, unsure if Mindfang knows her own illustrious heritage. She can't imagine her not knowing. It would be an odd thing for her to miss out on. "With an immense amount of passion for her work."

Mindfang grins, childishly, and her posture immediately takes on a relaxed, easy air. "I've always wanted to see the original books. I mean, I know I never will. And that there's no way it can ever happen. But, well--" She sighs, heavily and shrugs. Her hair sweeps over her shoulder, dramatically, a swirl of obsidian curls that bring with them the scent of her perfume. She gives Rosa a smirk. "Don't suppose I could use you as a hostage? Offer you in exchange for a few books?"

"Am I really worth that much?" Rosa asks, wryly, and Mindfang nudges her with her knee beneath the table. "Oh my. I'm so glad to know the loss of my life is equitable to looking over a few pages of yellowed manuscript that no one is even allowed to touch anymore."

"...No." Mindfang says, softly, staring down at the flowers painted along the rim of her cup. The comforting presence of her body beside her withdraws slightly as she tenses. "No, you're not."

It's almost as if she's been slapped. Slapped hard enough that her heart has whiplash. She wants to start crying. She wants to shuffle out of the room, find the nearest bathroom and sob herself senseless. "Oh."

"What? What's wrong with you?" Mindfang huffs, rolling her eyes. She nudges Rosa with her elbow and gives her a glare. "I'm picking you over books. Do you understand how much of a monumental sacrifice that is? You over priceless manuscripts."

It's as if the air has cleared and she's somehow been un-slapped. She flushes at her own stupidity and-- then-- well. She realizes-- it's a hollow thing, a victory that means next to nothing. She wants to ask her so many things. She wants to pull away from her and stare into her eyes and be serious, tell her that she's fond of her but she needs to know where this relationship is headed... because right now things seem incredibly precarious and it scares her. Mindfang feels affection for her. But how much affection? Is it real? Is it feigned? Is it sincere, or is it a petty diversion from her everyday duties?

"Rosa, Pet?" Mindfang murmurs, reaching out to stroke Rosa's face. She brushes her thumb over her lower lip in a gesture that's needlessly tender. Rosa feels the ridges of her thumbprint shudder over her teeth and, to her surprise, Mindfang lets out a soft hum of approval.
"Mistress?" Rosa asks, cautiously.

Mindfang flushes up along her cheekbones and it's a beautiful sight to behold, sapphire against silver. "You have quite nice teeth. I like that in a girl."

"Thank you, Mistress." Rosa murmurs, unable to shake the feeling that the compliment has a subtext she'll never have explained. She never had very many dreams as a girl. She knew what she'd grow up to do and so, of course, she did her best to pretend she didn't want anything like this. Like she didn't want to fall in love, be held close, be kissed--

But when she curled up in bed at night-- just every once in a blue moon-- she'd pull her blankets up to her neck and let her thoughts wander freely. She never knew what exactly she wanted. None of her fantasies of falling in love ever had a focus. There wasn't ever a trend or a trait she fixated on. But the need to simply be with someone who cared for her was always the prevailing theme. Sexual urges were there, of course, but the dreams of sitting underneath a tree in the sunshine with someone's arm around her waist and her head cradled against someone's shoulder, those were what mattered to her.

This is almost as good as those dreams. Perhaps she should even say it's better? But that seems like a fallacy, all things considered. She's owned by the woman beside her, her life was mangled by the Empire, her career was ruined-- her life has been horrible. But now she's sitting in a private dining room with winter sunlight streaming down onto the remnants of a rather lovely meal. There's a beautiful woman beside her and-- well--

She fits into Mindfang's body far too well. Rosa's head fits perfectly between her jawline and neck, breasts against breasts, arms slipping in against arms like they were knitted together. They fit so well, in fact, she's in danger of forgetting herself. But would that be so bad, really? Rosa nuzzles in more and Mindfang wraps an arm around her and grins. It's almost laughably easy to flatter her, the mere insinuation of submissiveness making her lavish affection.

"Thanks for indulging me, Pet." She mutters and then Rosa's surprised to be caught in a passionate kiss. Rosa responds with equal vehemence, despite her surprise, and her tongue boldly slips past Mindfang's lips before her Mistress can automatically take the upper hand. They're both a little taken aback by it but neither one of them pulls away. Rosa's horrified less by her own boldness and more by the fact that Mindfang pays no heed to whether or not Rosa feels comfortable kissing her in public. She doesn't seem to think about things like that; if she minds, it's not going to happen. If Rosa minds... that's a negotiable statement of fact. But it's a nice kiss, leisurely, unhurried by anything.

That is, of course, until someone knocks at the door and draws it open without waiting for a response. Rosa jolts away immediately, hiding her face against Mindfang's shoulder. Mindfang makes no sign of embarrassment, facing their waiter with a narrow-eyed stare.

"May I help you?" She asks, silkily, drawing Rosa's shawl more tightly around her shoulders in a gesture that could be caring or possessive. Rosa hides against her even more, pulling her knees up into Mindfang's lap and clinging like a limpet to her lapels.

The waiter fidgets, clearly uncomfortable. "I hate to bother you, Marquise, but there's a city official here asking after your, um, companion--"

Mindfang is clearly unhappy with the phrase because she snarls and covers Rosa's face. Rosa's glad because she's starting to let out a horrible keen, her voice reaching an ear-grating pitch.

Oh god, oh god-- they're here for her, they're going to take her away--
"Excuse me?" She snaps, letting out a horrible snarl. From the way her arm tightens around her shoulders, Rosa knows her Mistress has come to the same conclusion and hopefully--

Hopefully she's strong enough that she'll ensure no one will take her. But Rosa doesn't think so. She doesn't think so at all. Because no one can stand up to the government, to the strength of the crown and the empire.

"I mean no offense--" The waiter stammers, eyes going wide.

Mindfang curls her fingers into her hair and strokes the base of her horn. It's meant to be a soothing gesture but she tugs just a little too hard and it betrays her nervousness.

"What qualms can anyone possibly have with this lovely woman? I can tell you for a fact she's not wanted by the law--"

That's a lie. But Mindfang's voice is smooth and snag-free, absolutely calm.

"She's more than adequately dressed for your lovely restaurant, she's been nothing but well-mannered. I mean, good god, man, I'm more of an assault to sensibility than she is."

"They're saying she's a Daughter, Marquise." He says, eyes wide and nervous and his hands shaking.

Rosa lets out a horrified noise and hiccups because what the hell, Davina, what the hell-- what does she want, huh? To get her killed? Because that's just petty--

"Go inform them that if they have any qualms with the company I'm keeping they may take it up with me."

The waiter bows and scurries from the room as quickly as he can. Mindfang waits for him to leave before she swears, dropping her head back. "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

Rosa shudders and her nails dig into her Mistress's shoulder. "Don't let them take me." She whispers, her voice hitching. "They'll kill me--"

"Like fuck is anyone laying a finger on you," She hisses, softly, kissing her repeatedly on the temple. "Fuck, Rosa, fuck--"

"They're going to take me away," She groans and she's headed towards hysteria so quickly she can barely control herself. Breathing is almost impossible, calming down isn't going to happen-- "I don't want to go away." She whispers and Mindfang goes tense.

"We're going to lie. We're going to lie through our teeth, do you hear me? Don't say a thing. Don't say a word at all. Just-- let me handle this."

Rosa can't even nod she feels so numb, her mouth dry and her hands refusing to unclench. Mindfang flickers into a blur of motion, fixing Rosa's hair and wiping away smudges of lipstick with the pad of her thumb.

She works a ring off of her finger and grabs Rosa's hand. She straightens her fingers, reflexively, and Mindfang places it on her fourth finger. It's gleaming and sparkling in the late afternoon light filtering through the windows, the band a bright, mirror silver and the stone such a deep sapphire it's almost the color of Mindfang's eyes. Rosa's been admiring it all day, and stares at it on her finger, bemused.

"I don't like you lying." To me, is the unspoken end of that sentence, but Rosa forces herself to
ignore that. Mindfang takes her hand and kisses her knuckles. Her gaze is intense and almost blistering. She's holding on to her fingers so tightly Rosa's afraid her bones might shatter. "But I need you to, okay? Just. Lie like your life depends on it." Rosa's mildly amused by the supposition that she isn't used to lying. Of course she's used to lying; she's been on the run for over thirty years! And did a damn good job of it on all accounts, at least right up until the end. Rosa's made a living off of deceiving people, forging new lives and identities in the space of a moment. But she isn't used to following someone else's lead, nor does she still have confidence in her ability to deceive. If this goes wrong, will Mindfang be killed? She wishes she hadn't thought that.

"What's the ring for?" She whispers into her ear.

"We told the staff at the other place that the two of us were engaged. We're engaged. If they ask who you are to me, flash the ring and glare. Don't be afraid to show your fangs."

"But--"

There's a sharp knock at the door. Rosa remains curled into her Mistress's side and takes a deep, steadying breath. The door to their dining room opens slowly and to Rosa's eternal gratitude, it's not Davina. It's not anyone she's seen before, but he's clearly a member of the law enforcement-- she can tell that much from his uniform and facial expression.

"Good afternoon Marquise. Madam," He says, bowing to Mindfang who sits up a little more and tries to look imperious and, well, succeeds. "I hate to bother you, Marquise, but the matter is rather pressing."

"Of course." Mindfang murmurs, her voice taking on a bizarrely smooth tone, almost like chocolate melting over an overheated hearth. It's sultry but manages to successfully convey her annoyance. "How might we be of assistance?"

He clears his throat. "May I speak freely in front of--"

Rosa raises an eyebrow, trying to mimic the dismissive expression Mindfang makes whenever Rosa tries to talk to her when she isn't in mood to hold a conversation with her slave. Apparently Rosa succeeds in conveying the same sense of mild disdain, because no one comments on her appearance.

"My soon to be Matesprit, I'm afraid. Can't get rid of her, no matter how hard I try."

"You're not trying very hard, dear, let's be reasonable," Rosa murmurs, wanting to gloat at the sudden look of annoyance that flashes across Mindfang's face. She's displeased by the mild defiance, but unable to say a thing about it. Rosa polishes off the remainder of the wine in her glass. "Please, Marquise, let's be polite to our guest."

"You're only... betrothed?" He says, slowly, looking between the two of them as if they're ridiculously stupid. Mindfang curls close around her and looks as proud as she can.

Mindfang gives him an award-winning smile. "Yes. I do apologize if that offends you, Sir, but sometimes a long engagement isn't bad--"

"I'm rather traditional, I'm afraid," Rosa says with the lightest laugh she can muster. "And while someone is eager to get to the reception celebrations--"

Mindfang snorts, loudly, into her coffee. Rosa squeezes her hands and does her best to mimic an expression of love-struck affection. It works, apparently, because Mindfang blushes a little and the official looks blatantly uncomfortable.
"--but I insist on having the ceremony at home. My Moirail would never forgive me if I did it without her. So we're putting things off until we have enough time for a proper ceremony back at home."

"And I don't have any time available until the end of the year. Can't put my crew out like that. So we're living in sin. Or we would be--"

"Marquise."

Rosa says, sharply, but the blush spreading up the back of her neck betrays her. Even if they are playacting, the insinuation is still... very pointed.

"Sorry, Pet," Mindfang purrs, nuzzling her neck and pricking at her carotid with her fangs. Rosa reaches up to bat her away with her left hand and watches the man's eyes bug out at the sight of the ring on her finger.

"Be that as it may, ladies," He says with a cough. "I have reason to suspect that you are, in fact, a Daughter who is derelict from her duties."

"I'm the Marquise of the Eighth Ward. I'm Cerulean Caste," Mindfang murmurs, arching an eyebrow. "The blood in my veins is bluer than the ocean. My kismesis, the Admiral of the Royal Navy, can more than ably attest to this, seeing as he's currently in this very town--"

"I meant your, um, companion, Marquise--"

Mindfang stares at him with eyes so wide and taken aback that Rosa almost believes her to be in shock. She clutches at her chest and lets out a strangled guffaw before dissolving into laughter.

Rosa gives her a perplexed stare because, really, this isn't something to laugh about, at this rate she is going to die, no matter what Mindfang says and--

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, but you're accusing my betrothed, my future Matesprit, a woman I've known for ten years, who has slept with me every night for the past eight of them, of being the Dolorosa?"

Rosa twitches at the title. She attempts to hide it, but she twitches all the same.

"You think-- you think the woman sitting beside me, this admittedly gorgeous yet rather tiny woman raised the revolutionary Signless and concealed him from the empire for thirty three years before taking down half the Imperial guard during his execution?"

"I'm offended." Rosa manages to say with a light voice, squeezing Mindfang's hand so hard she swears she feels her fingers breaking. Mindfang clutches her hand just as hard. "You don't think I could do it?"

"No, darling, I don't think you could. You can barely manage being on a merchant trading ship let alone living in a zombie infested desert." Mindfang kisses her, softly, and laughs.

"Either way, Sir, I appreciate your thoroughness and, I mean no offense when I say this, none at all, but I don't think you really quite thought this through." She says it lightly enough that it shouldn't be an insult. But the slant of her eyes and the gleam of a fang tip over her garnet lipstick says otherwise. "Do you really think I would be foolish enough to harbor such a wanted fugitive?"

It's a good way to phrase it. He can't exactly answer positively, can he? Unless he wants to risk having his head bitten off (quite literally). But Rosa still holds her breath, forcing herself not to lose her temper or begin to sob. Thankfully for him and for her anxiety, he takes a few steps away from their table and looks suitably chastened.

"I didn't mean to disturb you, Marquise. The report was called in by a retired Daughter and it's the
Empire's policy to consider their statement as law. I see now that she must have been mistaken."

"I have been told I have a rather familiar face," Rosa murmurs, trying to look gracious instead of cautiously hysterical that *they're getting away with this absolute bullshit*. "It's a mistake that anyone could make, I'm sure."

"I commend you for your diligence," Mindfang says, relaxing and giving him a glowing smile. "Even if it has rather destroyed the mood, I'm glad that the arm of the law has been suitably thorough."

He turns to the door with a hurried apology and another bow and just... leaves. He leaves without so much as asking for their fingerprints, or even trying to get a good look at her eyes. Rosa's amazed. It might go against everything her little one stood for but, for once, she's glad for the hemospectrum. He'd be well within his rights to have asked Rosa to prick a finger for him, to verify her blood color. But no. Mindfang's a rareblood, an aristocrat-- no one's going to challenge her without solid evidence.

"Sorry. Don't mean to reopen old wounds." Mindfang mutters, carefully coaxing her hand from Rosa's and with the wince she makes with the action she knows she must have actually broken something. "I, um, I know you don't want to discuss it--" 

"I don't." She snaps, narrowing her eyes and Mindfang bolts upright, her eyes widening with shock.

"...You look like you saw a ghost."

"You knew. You know--"

"I know nothing. I just read the newspapers and made a few conclusions about what such an official might be searching for." Mindfang shrugs and as the waiter slips back into the room she places their dessert order as if their waiter doesn't look like he's on the urge of collapsing from fear.

They don't speak while they wait. Rosa can barely keep from crying; her eyes water, her hands tremble, her body shakes--

The waiter brings them their food and the bill. Mindfang stares at it, raises his eyebrows and coughs, politely. The bill is taken away without comment.

He closes the door behind him without another word. Rosa stares after him and wonders how in the hell Mindfang can get away with that.

While it feels good to have a companion at her side, someone to care about her, someone to sleep beside-- she's not entirely sure how she feels about Mindfang. She's a beautiful woman, she's an intelligent woman-- but, well, she's not necessarily a *good* woman. It's unsettling her. She sighs, heavily, and shifts away from Mindfang as best she can with how closely they're entwined.

She slips Mindfang's ring off her finger. Her hand feels naked and far too light without it, even though she's worn it for only a few minutes. She flexes her fingers and lets out a soft sigh.

"I'm sorry to have put you through such effort, Mistress," She murmurs, reaching out hand to pass the ring back to Mindfang. She stares at it like it's a rabid lobster, as if any second it's going to jump off of Rosa's palm and chop off her arm.

She doesn't make a sound for a few moments, her fingers clenching around her napkin. Then, she swallows and, in a voice that's far to casually dismissive says: "It wasn't an effort at all. Keep it."
"Thank you for your assistance." Rosa replies, her voice soft but firm, "But I can't accept this. Given--"

Her voice hitches. Mindfang's eyes dart up to her face and a flicker of hope goes bright in their blue depths.

"--Given my position." She continues, placing the ring on the space of the table between them. "I cannot accept this."

Mindfang's composure cracks and she growls, a soft sound like an irate puppy who's been told she's not allowed inside. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that as your slave I cannot accept this ring or what it represents." Rosa breathes out, her voice not wanting to move forward. It takes every inch of her soul to force her diaphragm to push the air out of her lungs.

Mindfang gives her a stare that's equal parts despair and frustration. Rosa can't tell if she's angry because her pride has been wounded or if she's angry because she's not getting her way; either way there's a fury brewing behind her eight pupils that makes Rosa want to crawl beneath a table and stay there. But she stands her ground, giving Mindfang her blankest stare until she lets out an angry huff and places the ring back onto her finger.

"This is exceptionally good coffee," Rosa murmurs, in an effort to abate the awkwardness crescendoing throughout the room. "I wonder what roast it is."

"You insist on acting like this." Mindfang murmurs, rubbing at the bridge of her nose and sighing, heavily. "I may have bought you--"

"Yes. You bought me." Rosa hisses, slamming her coffee cup down onto the saucer so hard it cracks. "You sent your servant to a slave market and he paid money for me and then he brought me to your ship and I was expected to be happy about it."

"I wasn't aware you had any grievances--"

"I don't! That's just it. I don't have any grievances." Rosa snarls a little too loudly to be entirely kind. Mindfang's ears flick to the back of her skull and lie flat. "Heaven knows I'm lucky to be alive and even luckier to have wended my way to you."

"Then what the hell is wrong with you?"

"Because, Captain," She snarls, narrowing her eyes. "You seem to forget that a woman in my position has certain limitations and certain expectations placed upon her."

"Why? Because someone in a slave market told you there were?" Mindfang snorts, dismissively, but the way she throws the remainder of her wine back betrays her frustration with Rosa's conversational transition.

"No. Because as much as you want to think well of yourself, at the end of the day you're not doing anything more than spoiling your pet."

"..." Mindfang opens her mouth as if to speak but, for once, she can't seem to find the proper words to layer over her ears like honey on a summer day. Rosa doesn't wait for her to regain her ability to speak.

"Don't lie to either of us. It's an incredible disservice to do so." Rosa snaps, doing her best to wrest
herself from Mindfang's grasp. Mindfang frowns, lines etching themselves into her face as easily as acid into silver, slowly wearing down the parts of her expression that haven't been carefully preserved. Her fingers tighten like a vise, almost as if her knuckles are forged from steel tempered by dragonfire. She's not going to move unless Mindfang says she can. "Are you just being a bitch because I brought up your dead kid?"

It doesn't take a woman of particularly gifted intelligence to discern the only reaction that such a remark could garner. Rosa stares at her in mute shock for a good thirty seconds before swallowing deeply and bursting into tears.

"Oh for fuck’s sake-- would you just stop? I’m not in the mood, Rosa." Mindfang snaps, yanking Rosa to her feet. She slaps her hands away from her face then mops away the worst of her tears with a napkin.

"We're not going to talk about it, darling. I have business to take care of. We’re staying in town tonight.” “I want to go home." Rosa hopes that the use of the word ‘home’ will be at least mildly appeasing. Mindfang’s grasp on her upper arm relaxes, slightly.

"I have an appointment in town this evening. And I don’t trust you alone on the ship."

"I like the ship. I like our bed." Rosa presses her face into Mindfang's collarbone and inhales the smell of her perfume to steady her nerves. "I just want to--"

"I know, Pet. I know. But I'm not letting you out of my sight unless I have to. And if I have to, I want you as near to me as possible." Mindfang adjusts Rosa's coat, straightens her scarf and runs a hand down her hair. "So we're going to go to the hotel. We're going to get a room and I will order you a very strong drink and we will not discuss anything."

She speaks in a voice that's low but incredibly authoritative, giving Rosa absolutely no room to maneuver. It's her Captain's voice, a voice Rosa's barely had opportunity to hear her use. There isn't any fighting with that voice. So she bows her head and says in a quiet, defeated voice she hates to hear herself use, "Yes, Mistress."

"Good girl. That's what I like to hear." Mindfang purrs, nuzzling her throat. Rosa feels her skin twitch where it's still sensitive from being covered by rough leather for so long.

Rosa finds herself ushered through the restaurant before she can respond. Mindfang stops at the podium and settles the bill she'd refused to pay minutes before. She clings to her Mistress's hand, hard, and tries to focus on the steadiness of her voice, the subdued warmth of her, the softness of the leather covering her fingers.

Mindfang leaves them a generous tip. Rosa's surprised until she hears the softly murmured: 'thank you for your discretion.'

They don't speak as they make their way down the street. Mindfang is moving quickly, her heels clipping like hammer blows on the concrete.

Rosa keeps her head down.

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The hotel is beautiful and if she were less numb she'd be marveling. Marble floors with golden veins that are polished to a mirror shine, gilded woodwork, gorgeous paintings, crystal chandeliers-- it's all luxurious.
Mindfang handles the entire exchange without so much as glancing at Rosa. She hears all of it but barely processes what's going on. There's 'reservation', 'another room', 'Lord Ampora' and some negotiation but she doesn't care about any of it.

"Come along," Mindfang murmurs after they've been handed a pair of brass keys. "They're going to send all our packages upstairs--"

"Packages?" Rosa asks, voice next to mute. It hurts to talk because, really, all she wants to do is cry. "What packages?"

"Darling, we bought thousands of dollars’ worth of clothing and half the inventory of a yarn shop-- what do you think happened to all of that?"

She shrugs. She shrugs and struggles not to cry. It's all too much, far, far too much. She presses her face against Mindfang’s shoulder.

"It doesn't matter, Pet," Mindfang soothes and her arms wraps around her shoulders once more. "We'll just make sure you have something to wear while you snuggle up in bed."

Rosa nods. She nods until Mindfang stops her with a soft touch to her chin.

Mindfang leads her upstairs by the hand and carefully guides her into their room. It's the first time she's been in an actual room in-- well-- heaven knows how long. Ages, really.

She wants to enjoy it. She wants to enjoy the roaring fire, the enormous bed that's twice the size of Mindfang's commodious berth on the Widow and the fact that they have a separate sitting room, and a bathroom that's as big as Mindfang’s entire quarters back aboard the Widow. There's a lot more space to hide in, too, which may be a good thing. Mindfang still looks annoyed, a dangerous expression on a woman with such a shaky grip on her temper.

Mindfang bolts the door, then crosses the room to the desk, pulling out a sheet of hotel stationery and beginning to scribble a note. Rosa takes advantage of her momentary distraction and slips into the bedroom, taking refuge in a corner of the room between the bed and the wall.

She hears Mindfang's sigh from the other room. She doesn't even have the courtesy to storm into the room-- she just slips inside and walks to the other side of the bed. Okay, so maybe it isn’t the best hiding place.

"Rosa the fuck are you doing?" Mindfang asks, irately, yanking her to her feet. Rosa makes an agonized sound. "You won’t let me go home."

"I won't leave you alone, that's awfully different from not allowing you to go home." Mindfang lets out a loud groan, struggling to get Rosa’s attention. "Look, look darling. Calm down. Go take a bath."

"I don’t want to."

"Who's in charge, little one?" She purrs and then growls a little when Rosa doesn't stop avoiding her gaze. She throws Rosa over her shoulder, ignoring her snarling or her squawk of pain when her horn catches on the doorframe. Mindfang deposits her on the bathroom counter and glares, darkly.

"Get in the bath. I will bring you alcohol. Stop crying." Her voice is dark and commanding, leaving absolutely no room for error or interpretation.

Rosa stares back without acknowledging her anyways. Mindfang huffs and turns on the taps, glaring at Rosa until the bath is full. When it's full she turns off the taps and all but throws the soap at her.
"We have two options here." She hisses, more malevolent than the situation really requires. "Either you're going to be a good girl and do as you're told and get in the bath or I will do it for you."

"Take a bath?" Rosa asks, dryly and she knows it's not in her best interest to sharpen her tongue in this moment but does so anyways.

"No. Tear your clothes off and throw you into the water and hold you under until you have something to actually cry about."

She's serious. She's utterly serious. Who in the world gets this angry over a bath? Mindfang, apparently.

"...I'll get in the bath." Rosa whispers, swallowing. Mindfang smirks. She trails her fingernails down Rosa's thigh with a soft purr of approval. "That's a good girl." She murmurs. Rosa waits for her to leave. She doesn't. She steps away, but she doesn't leave the room. She struggles to find something to say that will get Mindfang to leave the room without causing offense. But she's leaning against the wall and sneering, arms crossed in front of her. She doesn't look patient. Rosa reaches behind her and fumbles with the buttons she can reach. Her fingers are clumsy with fear. Eventually Mindfang steps up behind her. She doesn't ask permission. Just starts undressing her, undoing the buttons, guiding the dress off her body, letting it drop to the floor. Mindfang reaches out for the hem of her slip, beginning to slide it up Rosa's thighs. "Please don't." She manages to plead, her voice dulled by fear. "I'll do it. I'll be good." "Hmm..." "Please, Mistress." Rosa begs, hoping the honorific will go a ways towards appeasing her. "Please don't." "Fine. But I'll be back to check on you."

* * *

She undresses quickly and slips into the water, feeling that it's the only defense she has from Mindfang's displeasure. The soap is nice, which is one thing to be happy about, and the tub is big enough that she could really swim in it if she cared to.

She's scrubbed herself clean and washed her hair several times over when Mindfang returns. Rosa's in a bathrobe and still looks as irritated as a housecat who's spent hours having her tail tugged.

"Here," She mutters, handing Rosa a glass of champagne. "Drink it."

"I'm mad at you." She mutters, throwing it back without a second thought. It's far more bitter than she anticipated, leaving a horrible aftertaste in her mouth.

"I don't like this." She says, wincing and gagging. "Oh, that's foul."

"Really? Perhaps it's a bad bottle." Mindfang shrugs, sticking a hand into the water. "The bath's cold, darling. Get out."

"Why did you have to bring him up?" Rosa asks, before Mindfang can become insistent and breaks her resolve. "You did that just to hurt me."

"So what?" Mindfang pulls her from the bath in a swooping gesture, arms curling around her ribcage and hauling her out from the water. She's too nervous to protest the lack of modesty to the gesture; but Mindfang quickly hauls a robe around her shoulders and carefully adverts her eyes.

And just as quickly as the surge of rage hit her, exhaustion takes hold. She goes limp in Mindfang's arms, suddenly unable to hold herself up.

"Oh thank fuck," Mindfang exhales, hoisting her higher into her arms. "That took waaaaaaay too long to kick in."
Rosa does her best to summon up an accusatory stare and only manages to croak. "Don't look at me like that, okay? It's just a mild sedative."

She keeps glaring, even as she feels herself starting to fall asleep. "...That gets exponentially stronger when mixed with alcohol-- look, Pet, I really don't have time to deal with this, you know."

Rosa wants to protest that this seems a rather extreme measure to take in order to get one's partner to stop crying and that it's rather indicative of deeper mental problems--

But she settles for deciding to hold a grudge about this and succumbs to sleep.

* * *

She wakes up when the city's clock chimes eleven with deep, strident tones. Mindfang has settled her in the bed with all of the blankets piled up over her and it's warm to the point of discomfort. She kicks off the blankets and tries her best to ignore how dry her mouth is. Well, she'll give Mindfang one thing-- sedatives work wonders. She doesn't know what the woman did to her while she was unconscious, but Rosa rather suspects she was drugged to save Mindfang the trouble rather than drugged for a nefarious purpose. She's calmer now, too, able to keep her thoughts in order.

There's clothes sitting out on the armchair and she crawls out from beneath the sheets on shaky knees to dress herself. This dress has a lower neckline and a shorter hem; it fits a little nicer than the previous one but is far less modest. Rosa assumes it's some sort of revenge. As she fixes her hair in the mirror, she grimly tries to keep her mind off the fact that she was tranquilized to spare her Mistress the hassle of comforting her. There's a bitter feeling taking root in her stomach. Well. That settles it, she supposes. Mindfang doesn't care for her like a lover. Rosa can hear voices from the other room. She can make out Mindfang's clearly, her skin crawling with distaste, but the other voice seems to be stridently male. Did Mindfang drug her so that she could spend time with someone else? Is she jealous? Rosa stares at her own face, horrified. Why is she jealous?!

She pushes the door open a crack and is immediately greeted by darkness. She can make out Mindfang seated before the fire and, clearly, she's speaking to someone but the sound of the door opening immediately gains her attention. She glances over towards the bedroom and shifts, slightly, in preparation for battle. Rosa wants to throw the nearest vase at her skull. She wants to throw it, hard, sending the roses scattering and pouring water all over the rug. She wants to launch into a string of the worst invectives she knows and demand a satisfactory apology.

But the scenario has changed while Rosa's been asleep, as if the second act of play has began while she wasn't looking and now she's going to spend the performance desperately trying to understand what happened while she was gone.

"Oh my look who's finally awake," She purrs, giving Rosa a smile full of a flash of fangs. "Hello there, Pet."

"Good evening, Mistress," She whispers, eyes going wide. The room is dark, lit only by a fire that's threatening to burn out and an emotional aura is crackling like an angry snake in dry grass. She's afraid, suddenly, more afraid than angry--

Mindfang gives her a smile that's all syrup and no sweetness. It's the most horrifying thing she's ever seen and her heart skips a beat. She shies back into the bedroom but even as she tries to retreat she knows there's no use in attempting to escape her. Rosa can already feel the inexorable tug of her
presence pulling her closer, like she's a hapless moon caught in the orbit of a rather conceited pirate. She knows her fate will be all the worse if she doesn't go nicely. Mindfang's staring at her with a queer sort of darkness flickering in her irises, a hungry, frightening look that makes Rosa want to curl up in a ball and beg for mercy. If she doesn't go, she'll make her go. She'll force her way into her brain and make her feet move, taking step after step after step until she's at her side--

“You look scared, Pet.” Mindfang purrs in her most mellifluous tones. "Aren't you happy to see me?"

Her eyes are gleaming, lit by the low banking fire. Rosa itches to stalk into the room as silently as she can, rebuild the fire and then retreat. The room is full of the odor of cigarettes and she can't smell the faintest trace of Mindfang's perfume. One or both of them have been smoking and the smell of it makes her nose itch. It's a smell that's almost nauseating, especially after spending so many weeks at sea, in the fresh air, but made even worse by the twinges of memory that are brought back by the smell of burning. It's odd, it's foreign, it's out of place.

She wants to be back on the ship-- back on her ship, in Mindfang's commodious cabin that seems so small and cozy now that they've taken temporary residence in a whole suite of rooms. If they were home-- she swallows as the word forms in her mind-- if they were home, this wouldn't be so bad. Marcus would be lurking, somewhere, and she'd know where to hide, who to go to, what good it would do if she screamed--

She wavers, uncertainly, on the precipice of the room. She's just far enough away to be removed from the scene, unable to make out what they're wearing or drinking or any details beyond that it's Mindfang and a man. There's nothing lighting the room but the fire and the glow of a cigarette sitting in an ashtray beside the mysterious figure in the corner.

Mindfang is still staring at her and, finally, coughs, breaking the tension of the silence. The figure sitting in the shadows on the other side of the fire shifts and mutters something undecipherable under his breath. The male tones snap Rosa out of her reverie faster than the crack of a whip.

She stares at both of the room's occupants, wide-eyed and utterly uncertain. Without meaning to she reaches forward and smooths out her dress, running her hands over the fabric. She stands as tall as she can muster, folding her hands before her.

"You require my services, Mistress?" She murmurs, doing her best to ignore the man sitting in the corner of the room, as if he's nothing more than a new piece of furniture. As if she’s not terrified. As if she’s not angry. Just a... normal question that you’d ask your employer. Nothing uncomfortable happening here. Nope.

Mindfang is sitting at the edge of the couch closest to the fire, resting her chin in her hand. She looks every inch the queen, in her embroidered petticoats and expensive boots. Her hair is immaculate, for once, and she's wearing jewels Rosa's never seen. Her knee length skirt is bunched up so high that the lace trim on her stockings is readily visible. It's scandalous.

She doesn't know where Mindfang found the clothes she's wearing-- they're gorgeous clothes, expensive and perfectly tailored, clearly part of her private wardrobe. She must have sent someone to the ship to retrieve them. Furthermore, someone had to have helped her into them. Rosa's not sure who, but she's hurt that she wasn't woken up to assist her.

Hurt and terrified because they're not alone in the room anymore. This isn't a private exchange where Mindfang bullies her and no one but Rosa's there to witness it, mitigating some of the unpleasantness. There's a man sitting in one of the armchairs on the other side of the fire who will
witness every moment of this degrading exchange. He's sitting there, drink in hand and slouched back like he owns the place.

Her owner is the one sitting beside the fire with a serene look on her face, a glass of red wine in her hand and her face as smug as a wolf who's just fought her way to the head of her pack. And while Rosa's slept beside that wolf for so many nights that she can't use her fingers to count any longer, the reminder that she is a wolf--a wolf with teeth sharp enough to rend flesh from bone and eyes keen enough to see through any darkness is-- disconcerting. This vision of elegance and fashion, this woman sitting before her dressed like a queen and drinking wine that probably cost more that this entire hotel suite-- this is not the Mindfang she knows. This is not the woman who's capable of spending three hours scribbling in her journal, or who drinks her coffee with so much sugar and milk it can't be called coffee anymore and--

Rosa wraps her arms around herself and reaches for a pendant that no longer hands around her throat, fumbling for a strand of jade beads that hasn't hung from her next for almost thirty years, since the day she sold it so she could get the supplies they needed to live in the desert. It's a gesture she's forgotten about-- a gesture towards prayer, towards a notion of ceremony she'd entirely forgotten about. She hadn't lied to Mindfang-- she hadn't been a conscientious observer of services. But she was just as spiritual as any of her Sisters. Selling her rosary wasn't the easiest thing she'd had to do but, still, she hadn't missed it. Until now, now that she's facing down a woman who does not have her best interests at heart.

They're both staring at her. Something's expected of her, she knows that much. They expect her to come forward, acknowledge them, do something--

"Just come over here and say hello, darling." Mindfang purrs, smiling wickedly. "Isn't she gorgeous, Orphaner."

Her Mistress's male companion snorts. Rosa's too busy staring at the ground to process his name but it still makes her shudder. It's ominous, that's what it is. A harbinger of something, but she doesn't know what--

"I'm so sorry, Mistress." She murmurs, her voice coming out in a bewildered haze. Rosa's hardly aware of the words issuing forth from her tongue, but she allows herself to keep speaking. "But I don't quite know the protocol for a situation such as this."

"Don't be so shy, Pet." She croons, crossing her legs in a silken rasp of fabric. "Just come here."

There's a disgusted snarl from the other side of the room and Rosa jolts. "Honestly, Marquise, have you really fallen so low you can't even afford to have your slaves properly trained?"

Mindfang continues to smile, but her eyes narrow just enough to make Rosa panic. She raises a hand and snaps, twice. Without a second thought she goes to her Mistress's side. It doesn't require any thought on her behalf, her response bewildering her even as she's in the midst of dropping to her knees at Mindfang's feet. Why did she do that? How did she know to do that? The man is right; Rosa wasn't trained-- someone certainly tried to, but that's how he lost his fingers and after that no one really tried, the consensus being it was worth it to lose money on her rather than risk bodily harm. What am I? A dog? She wants to snap but, no, Mindfang's the bitch here. But she supposes she is the one wearing a collar.

"That's a good girl." She murmurs, bestowing upon her a smile that's condescending in a way she doesn't at all appreciate. But she forces herself to remain where she is, trembling against Mindfang's legs. "And to answer your question, Orphaner, I don't feel the need to destroy someone's spirit simply to make my life easier. I have my own ways of going about it, thank you."
"I know how you get obedience." He grumbles and Rosa steals a glance at him long enough to realize it's the man Mindfang abandoned her for earlier that day.

Mindfang sniffs, dismissively. She curls her fingers into Rosa's hair and to her surprise, immediately makes a dive for her horns. She skritches her fingernails along the base and it's enough to make her audibly moan. It's humiliating. She's ashamed that she can't keep quiet. Kissing her in public is one thing, touching her like this is another. She bites her lip, hard, and glares up at Mindfang. Her mistress ignores her gaze and keeps doing what she's doing.

Rosa digs her fingernails into Mindfang's ankle in an attempt to make her stop touching her, but Mindfang ignores that, too.

"Just because I like my crew--"

"Don't try to be noble, Marquise," He snaps, rising quickly. Rosa flinches. Mindfang makes a worried sound and strokes her head, softly.

He walks over to the bar and pours himself a wineglass full of brandy. Rosa wants to snap at him to use the proper glass, but it doesn't seem to be a good moment to be pedantic.

"If you're not paying her, she's a slave. She's not part of your crew." He says, and gives Rosa a dismissive stare, then snorts. "No matter how much you dress her up."

"Now, now, Orphaner, don't be cruel." Mindfang murmurs, rolling her eyes. "I'm sure my darling Rosa doesn't have any complaints about how she's been treated."

Rosa doesn't answer. She's going to be ill. She's beginning to feel terribly suspicious about her Mistress's motives. She wants nothing more than to sink her fangs into Mindfang's ankle, claw at her wrists and get away from this as fast as she can. This isn't a casual encounter. Mindfang's punishing her for something.

He gestures at her and snorts. Rosa stares at him behind the scant shelter of her hair, glaring, darkly at the streak of violet running through his hair. It looks stupid. "See? Even that agrees with me."

She notices, with a jolt, that he has gills on either side of his neck and the sudden realization that her Mistress is involved with a sea dweller sends her reeling because oh god what has she done, what has she done getting involved with this woman.

"Well, she doesn't." Mindfang says with an air of finality. He snorts and collapses back into her couch. "We're quite happy, aren't we Pet?"

Suddenly she's desperate to feel Mindfang's skin beneath her hands, feeling how soft she is, how warm her thighs are, to kiss her until she can hear her moaning--

I don't want to touch her. I want to slap her!, she tells herself and then, instead of irrationally longing for the feel of Mindfang's skin against her own, crippling panic sets in and all she can think of are shackles, shackles fastening around her wrists too tightly to ever be comfortable, rubbing her skin raw and begging for mercy as irons are placed into the flames and then brought to her skin--
Mindfang’s fingers are still on Rosa’s horn and they dig in, hard enough to make her whine audibly. The pressure on her head increases enough to make her close her eyes and breathe harder.

Finally she can’t withstand the pressure any longer. Her hands fly to Mindfang's waistcoat as ordered. This is vastly different than the week before, a playful little demonstration of what Mindfang can do. It’s subtle, insidious. If it weren’t for the fact that she knows what manipulation feels like, she'd wouldn't know that anything out of the ordinary is happening.

Instead of direct mandates there’s just a slight tug, a soft flow like a current washing over her consciousness and the thoughts surface organically. There's nothing unnatural about what's coming to mind because, well, none of the thoughts that surface are thoughts she hasn't had at least once before. But they're shifting like a kaleidoscope inside her head and she can tell it's a manufactured pattern. Mindfang is sifting through her thoughts and tugging on the ideas that are of use to her.

It's masterful. She'd be admiring if it didn't make her want to vomit all over Mindfang's assuredly priceless shoes. But, no, that urge is shooed away to the cellar where all her memories of her little boy have retired to. Buttons, is all she can think about, even as Mindfang’s hands mount her horns, tracing the hook and then lingering at the base before tangling in her hair. Rosa shivers from her neck down to her feet, pressing her face into Mindfang’s lap and letting out soft, breathy moans.

Since when has she cared this much about buttons? Never. But she forces herself to straighten up and undoes the first with shaking hands, torn between throwing herself on the floor in an attempt to fight off the mental advances or simply giving up and giving Mindfang her full obedience.

She's frightened enough of her Mistress that disobeying isn't an option but... She's also so angry she could cry. She undoes the next two buttons with fingers that shake as she struggles, then fails, to resist. Her head feels as if it's swollen to the point of madness and she despises Mindfang and everything else in that moment.

Her waistcoat comes unfastened. It's like almost every evening before, when Mindfang would swan in and collapse into her chair, complaining of this and that until Rosa would step over and undo her jacket, offer to pour her a glass of--

"What is she doing?" The Orphaner asks and his voice is terrifyingly deep, thundering in the room like an oncoming storm.

"Greeting me properly." Mindfang murmurs and she picks up her wineglass. It's not even halfway full but before Rosa can fully develop an urge to go refill it, it's squashed by an overwhelming need to slip Mindfang's waist off her shoulders.

She does it without a word of complaint or an attempt to resist because heaven knows it won’t succeed. But she doesn't make it pleasant, she doesn't glide her fingertips down her bare arms like she feels compelled to.

Mindfang is wearing nothing but a corset beneath it and it's stunning, even if it is a little too risqué for Rosa's taste. Rosa supposes she has every right to think what she wishes, but she'll be damned if anyone makes her admit to admiring how attractive her Mistress is at this very moment. Not just because she’s angry, but because she knows that it isn’t for her.

Rosa raises her hands and rests them against Mindfang’s ribcage. Mindfang hums, softly, and murmurs, 'good girl' under her breath. Rosa hears the Kismesis scoff loudly in the background.

Humiliation floods over her like warmth from a scalding cup of tea, flooding her with shame and rage from the tips of her toes to the point of her nose. But somehow she manages to keep her
composure, fingers fumbling with the hooks that range down the front of Mindfang’s corset. She tries to resist, now, struggling against Mindfang’s control but she won’t let her go--

Well. Fuck that. She narrows her eyes. You want to play this game, Marquise? We can play. And I’ll be damned if you win. Before Mindfang realizes what’s happened, Rosa's starting in at her corset, not seeming to notice as it slowly comes undone. When Rosa’s fingers brush the waist of her petticoats, however, Mindfang's attention snaps back to her.

Rosa stares up at her with eyes that are next to vacant, doing her best to curtain her emotions behind a heavy layer of velveteen indifference. It's not a hard feeling to conjure; it's been there since the day she was purchased, lurking anxiously beneath the surface of her skin.

Apathy is easy, after all. It's caring that hurts. Mindfang looks down at her with a scrutinizing glare and Rosa is aware that, for the first time this night, her Mistress has realized who exactly is sitting at her feet. But as soon as the flicker of guilty recognition arises it drowns, quickly, in a flurry of annoyance when the Orphaner clears his throat.

"So, Orphaner," Mindfang says casually, her eyebrows rising. Rosa's hands stop brushing against Mindfang's skin for a moment and then, oh god there's panic crushing her chest once more, unnatural panic that rises from nowhere like a lightning strike. "What brings you all this way to the Northern Circle to see me?"

"You know why I'm here, Marquise." He snaps, and leans forward out of the shadows of the fire with his eyes narrowed. He's got horns like spears.

Mindfang grins at him, wickedly, and Rosa practically collapses to the floor when her Mistress's control floods from her brain, leaving nothing but her shock and horror behind. She falls into a heap of flesh and bone on the oriental rug that covers their sitting area, face pressed into the silk of the carpet. It smells absolutely terrible, like stale cleaning product and antiquity. Rosa refuses to give into the emotions. She swallows back every single one of her screams of fear and forces her breathing to remain steady.

Why? She wants to scream. Why are you doing this? Why--

"Marquise, I'm ashamed at you," Her male companion mutters, and his voice comes out like crushed velvet. "Giving up your plaything already?"

Mindfang crosses her legs and Rosa's pulse speeds up immediately at the sound of her stockings rasping together. "I wouldn't say that, Orphaner--"

Orphaner, she knows that name-- doesn't she? Now that she's not at Mindfang's breast, feeling the faint warmth radiating off of her skin, her brain is beginning to behave once more and she knows that name but her heart is still thudding like a war drum and she curls in on herself and tries to regulate her breathing.

"--But if you're going to tell me it's more worth my time to play with my little pet instead of you, I'm more than happy to do so."

"I thought you missed me." He mutters, snorting loudly. "What happened to you, my dear? Where has the love gone--"

"Oh shut up, Eadric. No one gives a fuck. I thought you'd grown enough of a dick to make me feel like you were worth my time--"

"Oi. Oi. Annie, we both know my dick attack--"
"FIRST, FIRST-- Don't call me Annie and second of all-- dick attack? Really? Really?" Mindfang snorts, but Rosa can see that she's happy and it's... not okay.

She forgets all about trying to figure out how in the fresh hell she knows who the Orphaner is and lifts her head up. Mindfang is leaning forward now, elbows propped up in her lap and her fingers skirting the bowl of her wineglass.

"Mea culpa," He mutters, throwing his hands in the air. "Didn't mean to offend your... tender feminine wiles."

Mindfang laughs. It's a genuine laugh that makes Rosa's hackles rise like flotsam on the waves. The look of pleasure on Mindfang's face is making her furious. If you're going to use me, she thinks, watching Mindfang swing her hair over one shoulder to properly show off her cleavage, at least do it properly.

This is humiliating. She should be full of righteous rage over having been treated like a puppet, not angry that she's being ignored in favor of this idiot. That's not fair. That's not fair at all. For all she knows he's an incredibly pleasant, highly intellectual man with a carefully cultivated taste in music, literature and-- No. No he's wearing a cape and purple glasses. Anyone who dresses like that really doesn't deserve kindness.

Rosa glowers up at her mistress as best as she can. It's hard but she manages it despite how touchable her breasts look in her corset, how beautifully the blue of the satin contrasts against the black lace trim and how silvery her skin looks-- Damnit is she thinking this on her own or is Mindfang doing this to her?

She wants the Orphaner to depart immediately so she can inform her properly just how much she's enjoying the view. Or, perhaps-- Rosa narrows her eyes-- slap her senseless and see how much she likes being pushed around--

"--I don't know about you, Eadric, but I think it's been far too long since we've last met." Mindfang says, softly. "But that doesn't mean I'll allow you to walk over me. I won't be taken advantage of because my delicate sensibilities want me to kiss you."

He snorts, but Rosa sees his jaw twitch and watches him struggle to keep some unknown emotion under tight control. He remind her of a caged beast, she realizes, shuddering once more. Not the primal ferocity of the Marquise when she loses her temper, nor the proud wildness that's always slinking along just beneath her carefully cultivated veneer of aristocracy. She knows what she is and while she's trained herself to hide it, she's never denied being a monster.

But the man before her-- he doesn't know what he is. Or if he does, he's probably done his best to forget it. He's not like his companion, a woman who will rip through the most sacred recesses of your mind just to prove a point and then say 'sorry, not sorry' and pull you into bed. He'll deny being a beast until he can't fight it any more-- and it makes Rosa nervous. Because she knows if anyone can get to him-- let loose the fierce creature that's been caged for so long-- it's Mindfang.

"I'd never take advantage of you--" He says, tiredly, and Mindfang cuts him off with a snort. He snarls, a flash of teeth that are all as sharply pointed as Mindfang's fangs and Rosa can't stifle her yelp of fear, reminding them both that she's still there.

"For the love of the empire, Vienna, shut that thing up." He snarls and it only takes Rosa a moment to process that she is the thing and--

Mindfang sighs, heavily, and finishes off the last of her wine. "Calm down, Eadric. You're just
frightening her, that's all."

"I will not 'calm down'. The only reason you brought it here is to make me jealous and we both know it," He hisses, pointing with a finger that looks so threatening that Rosa flinches again and covers her face with her hands. She doesn't know if she's defending herself from him or his words--either way, she's hiding.

"Vienna, either get rid of it or I will dispose of it as I see fit."

"I'd like to see you try." Mindfang murmurs, arching an eyebrow.

He snarls and half rises from his chair. Rosa whimpers and all but throws herself against Mindfang's legs, clutching to her knees. Mindfang places a hand to the back of her head and lets out a warning hiss.

"Don't you dare Eadric. I won't have you upsetting her any more."

"You're just afraid--"

"Yes, Eadric, I'm afraid of your giant metal bathtub and your incompetent crew of naval dropouts. I'm so, so afraid because of the many times you've almost caught me--"

He does get to his feet this time, looming over them in a flourish of violet satin and the smell of expensive cologne and cigar smoke. He lunges for Mindfang and Rosa snarls and scrambles up into Mindfang's lap. It surprises them both. She didn't know she was capable of such quick movement and Mindfang clearly wasn't anticipating it.

She places herself between him and Mindfang and bares her teeth. He stares at her, clearly taken aback, but before either of them can lunge Mindfang wraps her arms around her and pulls her tight to her chest, trying to shelter her.

"EADRICH." Mindfang snarls, covering Rosa's head with her hands. "I'm going to throw you out of this room if you don't cease this immediately--"

"Cease this immediately? Wow, shit's getting serious now. Better back off, Annie's using big words--"

"Don't call me Annie!"

Rosa glares into Mindfang's lap, debating the merits of slapping them both. Mostly him because he's getting under her skin faster than anyone has ever before; so quickly she's considering slashing her throat with her bare hands just for no reason other than he sucks.

"Eadric-- just--" Mindfang sighs and a hand curls into her hair, fingers skirting the base of her horn. "I don't want to do this right now."

"...What are you saying."

"I'm saying that I--" She breaks off with a huff and Rosa lets out a soft yowl when her Mistress's hand tightens in response to some unknown stress and yanks, painfully, on her hair.

"Sorry, Pet, sorry," Mindfang murmurs, making worried sounds. Rosa suspects that, to be quite honest, she did it on purpose in order to avoid having to defend herself to her Kismesis. "Oh you poor, poor thing I'm so sorry-- let me take a look--"
Rosa sits up, slowly, at her urging, doing her best to show the man behind her nothing but her back because she can't stop the suspicious glower that's forming on her face.

"Don't--" She hisses, so quietly that Mindfang can barely make out her voice. "Don't touch me."

Mindfang narrows her eyes. But still in the same worried, affectionate tone she murmurs, "Oh my poor dear I didn't mean to hurt you."

"Why are you doing this?" Rosa whispers, her voice keeping a steady, emotionless cadence.

Mindfang covers up Rosa's words with a vocal show of concern and panic. "Oh no, darling you're okay, you're okay-- don't fret-- you're not even bleeding."

"As if that would make any difference." The Orphaner mutters, rolling his eyes. "You'd let anyone between your legs even if they had blood as burgundy as your wine."

"I didn't realize my Pet's blood color was of any importance," Mindfang murmurs, urging Rosa off her lap now that the subject has been safely shifted. She still keeps her close, however, and to Rosa's horror she takes her hand and squeezes it, softly.

"Besides, Eadric," She murmurs, quietly. "If you're going to keep secrets from me, I don't see why I should be forced to tell you what hue my little one is bleeding."

Rosa curls a little closer and, to her horror, a smile spreads across her face. It's a smug smile and she makes sure the Orphaner sees it, loud and clear.

He stares at her for a moment and then collapses back into his chair, rolling his eyes. "For the love of all things sacred, Vienna, I'm not keeping anything from you."

"You are, Eadric. You are and I know it." She grumbles, nudging Rosa until she sits up and curls against Mindfang’s side with knees in her lap and head pressed to the curve of her throat. She keeps a possessive hand tangled in her hair.

"Darling, you know how hard it is to keep secrets from me." Mindfang purrs, giggling a little. "You can't keep so much as a new coat of paint on your bathroom a secret from me, let alone the secrets you're trying to hide."

"Annie, if you knew what secrets I was keeping from you, you'd hardly be sitting here." He grumbles and gives Rosa and Mindfang another furious glower. "I'm not doing it to hurt you, my little spider."

Rosa snorts and is forced to turn it into a cough when Mindfang yanks her hair again.

"Then why are you doing it?" She mutters, sullenly, and Rosa realizes she's pouting. Pouting like a little girl who's just been told she's not allowed any more candy before dinner. It would be endearing if Rosa couldn't see the hurt blossom deep in her eyes and the sudden softness of a caress over her forehead. "Do you even care about me anymore?"

Rosa rolls her eyes. But the Orphaner clears his throat and lets out a tremendous sigh.

"The Marquise Spinneret Mindfang is asking me whether or not I still want to fuck her." He grins, rakishly, and Rosa's surprised to note his fingers tensing on the arm of his chair and see the golden rings on his fingers gleam in the firelight. There's a sapphire in one of them, dark as the ocean and as brilliant as Mindfang's eyes. He shifts, anxiously, under Rosa's scrutinizing gaze and fidgets with his rings.
Mindfang, almost subconsciously, reaches up and brushes her hair back behind her ear, the one covered in earrings. There's a gorgeous purple diamond solitaire in one of them and Rosa feels a twinge of anxiety close up her throat because she'd never stopped to think about it before. What any of this meant. Well, of course she never considered what it might mean to be the buffer between her owner fighting with her Kismesis because who plans to be sold into slavery--

But this is real. This isn't a twisted form of hate turned into physical passion. This isn't curdled love, this isn't a fighting red couple or anything she'd ever assumed a black couple was in her small little world. There's love between them, Rosa can tell that much. They wear each other's colors and speak to each other like lovers would--

It's unsettling to realize it. To-- well-- realize they have a proper kissemitude that is quite apparently in jeopardy.

"The Orphaner Dualscar knows that's not what he's being asked." Mindfang snaps back and Rosa curls a little closer to her and then kisses her neck with the barest brush of lips. "And he should remember how he got that name in the first place."

He gets to his feet once more and starts to pace the room. Mindfang nuzzles into her shoulder and Rosa can feel her shaking.

"Vienna, I don't want anything to happen with us," He finally says, softly. "But I hardly feel comfortable having this conversation in front of..." He gestures at Rosa. "...That."

Mindfang stares and makes a hurt noise in the back of her throat. "You're using Rosa to keep from having to break up with me?"

"No-- No, I'm--" He runs a hand through his hair, ruffling it so that he looks like a frightened kitten that had an unfortunate accident with the food coloring. "Look, Vienna, we do need to talk about something but-- it's a private matter."

Rosa glares and shows her teeth. He gives her an ugly snarl in response.


"Darling dear," He murmurs, trying to smile and only grimacing. But he laughs a little, a warm, dry sound like fresh wood placed onto a hearth. It's a laugh that makes the room a little brighter and Mindfang relaxes slightly beside her.

"There's always something wrong with us. That's the point of our relationship." He leans in to Mindfang and, despite the fact that Rosa's there, he kisses her.

It's a tender kiss but they both smile through it. Rosa can smell his cologne, expensive and absolutely perfect--

She wants to hate him for everything. She wants to hate his clothes, but this close she can see how finely they've been sewn, how expensive the fabric is and how well they fit him. She wants to hate his hair but it's obvious that he was born like that and she's hardly one to criticize a genetic anomaly. She does hate him for how familiar he is with Mindfang. She's brightened up like the full moon at high tide since the moment he walked into the room. He might make her angry, she might be irritated but he's bringing her to life, somehow, in a way Rosa's used to doing herself.

When he pulls away, Mindfang makes a happy noise in her throat. He gives her a tight, anxious smile and Mindfang returns the expression with somewhat more tension around her eyes.
He reaches out to touch her face and in a flare of reaction she can't suppress Rosa lashes out and shoves him away. She doesn’t know which one of them is the most surprised; Mindfang, who expected her to be quietly complacent, Dualscar, who wrote her off as harmless, or herself who… really should know better at this point. Mindfang is, thankfully, the first of them to react. She gets up quickly, pointing at the bedroom and snarling. Rosa goes without a thought of protest.

"Excuse us," Mindfang says, darkly, following Rosa into the bedroom. Mindfang slams the door, hard, and locks it. She shoves Rosa across the room. She stumbles and manages to catch herself on the bedframe, balancing somehow. She turns around to face Mindfang as quickly as she can, afraid to show her Mistress her back. Well.

This is it. She's going to die. From behind it she hears the Orphaner growling something offensive.

"Rosa I don't know what you're doing--"

"I don't want to share." Rosa hisses, showing the front of her fangs and failing not to lunge. She goes in for Mindfang's neck with the ferocity of a starved rainbow drinker. Mindfang catches her by the throat before she can make contact.

They're both functioning at a purely animal level for the moment, in flashes of teeth and rumbling tones. So Rosa isn't at all surprised when Mindfang reaches out and curls a hand around windpipe, reflexively tightening her fingers until Rosa squirms..

"I asked you what the fuck you thought you were doing!" Mindfang repeats and her hand tightens, cruelly. "Because I know you think you're doing something, Pet and I don't think I like it."

Rosa snarls again but it's a swan song.

"I may be fond of you, Pet, but I have never once led you to believe you have any modicum of control over me. While I allow you certain liberties--" Mindfang's whispering now, her eyes widening with tension. Her lips are going white with the clearly suppressed need to rip out her throat.

"I captain of my ship and anyone aboard, any passenger or sailor is under my command. You are no different." Mindfang's voice lowers to a barely audible pitch. "I see no difference between Mistress and Slave, beyond that my word is law. If you wish for me to respect you I will insist on respect in return."

"I'm yours," Rosa insists in a wheeze, still thrashing, although now half-heartedly because, well, she's starting to see the night sky at the edges of her vision.

"Yes. You are mine. But I am not yours. It is not a reciprocal relationship--"

"Is he better than me--" She snarls and Mindfang's face goes blank before crumpling up more furious than before.

"He's my Kismesis. You are my slave. Do you understand the difference?" She hisses, and Rosa stares. Her stomach plummets, hard, into her feet. "I am fond of you, Rosa but I will not condone--"

"I will not be shoved aside." Rosa whispers, narrowing her eyes. Mindfang stares back and tension twitches between them like a broken wire, sending sparks out into the atmosphere every few moments.

"We're not even in in a relationship and you're jealous of my Kismesis?" She snaps, finally, glowering. Her eyes are like blue coals, smoldering from some far deeper place than just the back of her skull. "Even if we were... together I certainly wouldn't tolerate this behavior!"
"We are involved." Rosa hisses and Mindfang stares, blankly. "Don't you dare deny that fact--"

"If you're going to act like this, I'm going to need to put a stop to it."

She says 'stop to it' like it's the most frightening thing in the world and for the first time in almost two months, Rosa believes her. Believes that she may be killed. Believes that the silvery thread of her life if held in the hands of a woman who isn't at all afraid to snap it if she wakes up one morning and decides she doesn't want her anymore and--

Rosa stares at her, doing her best not to lose her composure completely. Given the circumstances, Mindfang’s keeping an admirable grip on her temper-- but it can't last forever. She probably won't last two more minutes before sending her head through a wall.

Mindfang huffs. She huffs and looms forward. With a practiced gesture she shoves Rosa to the floor with the toe of her boot. Rosa falls like a tower without a base and stares up at her Mistress with a blank face.

Mindfang braces a foot against her neck. She doesn't step down, she doesn't kick, she doesn't even make a threat. But Rosa can feel her blood throbbing against the sole of Mindfang's boot and she doesn't want to do anything but sob because the look in her eyes is pitiless and cold.

"I should kill you now." She says, softly, her voice like a sheet of white paper. "I should kill you before I regret my time with you."

It's not a 'I'm fond of you' but it's still an admission that she means something. It's admission that having to kill her would be something Mindfang would regret.

It's enough that Rosa ventures a whine, one that's soft and pitiful and she watches Mindfang's ears flicker forward and her face twitch along the jaw. She ventures it again, doing her best to pitch her voice to sound as much like a cerulean newborn's call as she can. It's not perfect, but it's enough of an approximation that Mindfang knows what it's meant to be.

She turns away from her with a dismissive huff. "Get out of here. Now."

She takes her foot off of Rosa's neck and she rolls onto her back, staring up. Mindfang huffs and folds her hands over her waist. Even half-undressed she looks stunning. Mindfang reaches down and grabs her by the hair, yanking her off the floor. She sits up with a screech but forces herself to go silent when Mindfang snarls, showing a fang.

"Go back to the ship. Go to your cabin and don't you dare leave until I send for you." She hisses, pulling her the rest of the way to her feet. "And I swear to fuck if you cause any more problems for me tonight I am going to beat you so hard you can't walk for a week do you understand me?"

Rosa keens but Mindfang glares even more darkly. "Understand?"

"...Yes, Mistress," She whispers and feels her blood rushing through her ears as it pounds through her chest. "I understand."

Mindfang gives her a horrible smile. "Good girl. Now you're going to apologize to the Orphaner and leave us be."

Rosa stares. She stares and then tears her face out of Mindfang's grasp and they're back to facing off and snarling. "No."

"...Excuse me?"
"No. I won't apologize to him." She says, as calmly as she can, backing away to put the couch between the two of them. "He doesn't deserve that courtesy."

"I am going to--" Mindfang kicks the coffee table aside. The glasses atop of it fall and shatter on the carpet, spilling wine.

"Beat me. Fine." Rosa snarls, narrowing her eyes. She skitters back to the fireplace when Mindfang half scrambles over the couch with a ferocious snarl. "It's worth it."

Mindfang looks ferocious. Not necessarily angry but-- well-- violent. Incredibly violent. Her face is silver white with just the faintest amount of blue along her cheekbones. She looks like she's clambered from the pits of deepest hell, her eyes wide and her jaw tense and her fangs bared.

She's scared but she's not as scared as she was the first time Mindfang went for her throat and not nearly as frightened as she was just minutes before. Mindfang may kill her tonight, she may snap her neck and drop her off the hotel's balcony and frame it as an accident but-- well--

Rosa's own temper is enough to increase her courage. She's tired of this-- of being replaced, stepped over- forgotten--

"Do you think I'm playing with you, Rosa?" She hisses and manages to right herself. She lunges towards her. Rosa tries to duck out of the way but Mindfang catches her by the horn and slams her head into the mantle.

She sees white and black all at once and she lets out a horrible scream that makes her ears burn. Mindfang makes a noise that Rosa's reasonably sure is concern but she keeps her trapped against the fireplace. She can feel heat searing her back and the heat makes her already trepidatious courage start to wonder about turning tail and running away.

"I may be fond of you, my darling, but that doesn't mean I'll put up with this." Mindfang hisses, but she wraps her arms around her waist and pulls her close in a strangely twisted gesture of affection.

Rosa beats her hands against Mindfang's shoulders, digging her nails into her neck, her jaw, her shoulders-- anywhere she can find skin. Blue lines rise on her skin in a hundred different places but Mindfang doesn't react.

She drops her hands, panting loudly-- struggling, hard, not to cry. But her eyes well up more and more the more she struggles. "He's not a good man."

"Yeah? And guess what?" Mindfang slams her forehead into Rosa's and her eyes swim once more. She can feel Mindfang's breath on her cheeks and it's hot and almost moist. "I'm not a good woman."

She reaches out to brush a few strands of stray hair behind her ear with a slow, warm smile.It's a tender gesture, an incredibly tender gesture. It makes Rosa's stomach go acidic in a single heartbeat. Mindfang’s fingers curl around her ear and skirt along the shell so gently that it's almost as if she's doing something kindly.

"I am fond of you, Pet." Mindfang says, and her voice is warm and flirtatious and absolutely entrancing. It's the kind of voice that would draw in a Luna moth from miles away, to a light that's deadly but oh so beautiful even as it kills--

"But if you try to interfere in my business I will kill you." Mindfang breathes out, slowly, each word soft and sad like the last words of a funeral rite. "I'm very fond of you. But I will take your life if I have to."
The Dolorosa doesn't say a word. There isn't anything she can say to that, of course. There isn't a response that's anywhere near adequate. Begging is useless, crying is useless, snarling is worthless—Rosa braces her hands on her Mistress's shoulders and does her best get shy away. Mindfang's bigger, stronger, healthier and she doesn't let go.

"But if you--" She begins, her voice nearing hysterics. "If you-- If you like me--"

Mindfang's still glaring, her face going darker and darker with the rise of her temper. "I made it clear what my intentions are in regards to you. And you made it clear that you do not reciprocate--"

"I never said that." Rosa whispers. "I never said that--"

"You made quite a case this morning about the fact that you're not at all comfortable with being treated as anything more than my slave. And as far as I am concerned, that means you have only accepted my romantic overtures out of a sense of duty."

Rosa closes her eyes and groans. Shit. This is exactly what she was afraid of. Saying ‘I told you this would happen!’ won't calm Mindfang down, though. Is she really only doing this because Rosa hurt her feelings? "I didn't mean to hurt you--"

"Well you managed to quite expertly."

"Are you trying to sleep with him to make me jealous?"

"No. I'm trying to sleep with him because he's my Kismesis. He's my blackmate! I've been with him for sixty years now! I'm trying to sleep with him because I haven't seen him in almost eleven months and I miss the smell of his skin after we make love and I miss feeling his gills flutter against the back of my hands--"

"He's disgusting."

"I might want to rip his ear fins off and he might be keeping secrets from me but I love him. And there is no way I will allow you to insult him." Mindfang snarls and it's horrifying to realize how serious she is.

"If he's so important to you why am I even here?"

Mindfang doesn't meet her eyes. She blinks at her then looks away, staring at the chandelier, the windows— at everything but her face.

"Did you bring me here to make me jealous because you think I rejected you?" Rosa asks, quietly. Cold realization is beginning to settle around her like a mantle of righteous superiority and she takes a deep breath. "Is this your way of getting me to like you?"

Wonderful. Just— just wonderful. She played right into Mindfang's hands. Done exactly what Mindfang wanted her to do, reacted as she was asked to react.Rosa stares at her, chest still heaving with ill-conceived rage. She lets forth a warning growl and Mindfang sneers.

"I've never been under the delusion that you're a good woman, Mistress," Rosa snaps, flashing her teeth. Mindfang curls back her lip to reveal a single fang and ends up looking like a mournful gargoyle. "But I was hoping that, for once, I'd found someone who wanted me around."

This time, she's the one to storm out of the room. She slams the door behind her, clearly startling the Orphaner, who had clearly given up on getting his Kismesis back and is curled up on the couch with a well-thumbed novel.
"She's all yours," Rosa says, curtly, pulling her coat on and, in a vindictive move she hopes will hurt Mindfang, leaves her shawl behind. "Tell her if she's lucky I'll be back at the ship."

* * *

Rosa makes it halfway down the stairs before taking refuge in a convenient alcove, tucking herself between the wall and a potted fern so she can cry in semi-privacy. She knew it, damnit. She knew something like this was going to happen.

She’s still in shock that she’s spent so much time at her Mistress's side, woken up beside her, sat in silence beside her while she wrote, brought her coffee-- and still knows nothing about her. She matters about as much as any other servant probably does. For once, Rosa refuses to consider this an unfair accusation.

It might have only been a few weeks, but it had felt like they’d created their own little world populated by uncouth sailors, rather intermittent weather patterns and quite a bit of alcohol. To be confronted with the fact that they hardly know a thing about each other, that they hardly matter in the scheme of each other's lives--

That's hard to tolerate. She was barely aware of this man's existence, beyond a few dropped hints; she's reasonably sure there's a Moirail somewhere out there in the vastness of the world, but it’s so hard to think of these people as read when Rosa’s never met them. She could tolerate this better if she’d known him from the beginning, gone into the arrangement knowing the rules to the game. Instead he shows up out of nowhere and acts like Rosa's the intruder. Mindfang let him, too, which is by far the worst. No-- Rosa sniffs, desperately trying to get her emotions under control. No, the worst is that Mindfang tried to play them off each other for her own benefit. Make Rosa jealous! Make her kismesis jealous! Profit when they fight for her attention!

He calls her Annie. Not Mindfang, not Spinneret, not Vienna-- Annie. And she snarls back at him to stop, true, but she doesn’t sound angry. She sounded flattered by the fact that he’s still trying to get under her skin. There's more to Mindfang's universe than Rosa and her ship. And it hurts to know that she's not necessarily... special to her.

Or perhaps she is special, but she's not the only special one. There's other special ones-- Either way, she's definitely not the most special, because she was just used to make one of Mindfang's other partners angry, apparently without regard for Rosa’s own feelings. She presses the heels of her hands into her eyes and takes a deep breath to a ten count. She can't lose control over this.

It's not natural to care so much. She knows that to the depths of her bones. Jealousy is wrong and prohibitive to the natural progression of their race. Plus, who gave her the right to be jealous? They haven't even had sex! If they'd have had sex and their quadrants hadn’t settled down, perhaps this would be permissible--

Rosa stops herself short. No. It wouldn't be. Mindfang has a pre-established relationship with the man, who's probably taking her to bed right now. He's part of her life’s story in a way that only can be accomplished through decades of companionship. Rosa can’t hope to obtain that importance after a handful of weeks.

She blots her face on the hem of her dress, praying that her eyes aren’t swollen. They probably are. Rosa takes the rest of the stairs at a quick, steady pace, pausing just before the reception desk to fix her hair. She doesn’t know where she’s going. She doesn’t know if she’s going back to the Widow or if she’s going to do something petty. But she sure as hell isn’t going to do it looking like a bedraggled shrew. She tries to pretend that It's a good feeling and she carries herself like she's always felt that way, that she was born into the sort of life where she throws melodramatic fits about her
girlfriend's boyfriend, throws a vase at her head and stomps out of the room.

Rosa wants to be that kind of woman. The kind that's confident and unafraid that the next morning she'll be all alone. If she was that kind of woman, she would have thrown a vase at Mindfang’s head. She sure as hell deserves it.

Instead, she doesn’t even make it to the door before breaking down again. She takes refuge in a chair tucked in a corner of the lobby, face in her hands as she tries to pretend that she’s just… tired. Or stressed. Not crying-- definitely not crying. The concierge eventually notices and, with a surprising show of tact, makes her way over.

"You look a bit out of sorts," She murmurs, softly, giving Rosa a sympathetic smile. "Could I get you a cup of tea, perhaps?"

Rosa wants to say no, I'm a dignified woman who's not having any problems whatsoever, look at how controlled I'm being in this moment! But she just keeps crying. What’s wrong with her? This isn’t her! She helped lead a revolution! She’s killed lots of people and never lost sleep about it! She doesn’t get upset about stupid things like this! But lately all she’s been good for is… crying. And some more crying. And a little bit of fear. So she gives the concierge a small, pitiful smile that barely merits the noun. "That would be lovely, please."

She’s kind enough to take Rosa into a back room instead of leaving her to cry in the lobby-- it’s probably bad for business to let patrons bawl in public spaces. The woman doesn’t try to introduce herself, nor does she mine for details. They make awkward small-talk as the tea is brewed, water poured into an old ceramic mug over pre-bagged tea. Rosa wraps her hands around it, amazed at how much better it feels just to be holding the damn mug. This is the kind of tea she’s familiar with-- you don’t have time for silver tea services, loose leaves and china when you’re running from the government. Mostly because you never have the money for that.

The concierge watches over her with a silent kindness that makes Rosa oddly grateful. She passes her time by flitting back and forth between the back room and the desk, leaving Rosa to focus on the task of calming the hell down.

Eventually her breath begins to come in a little more easily, and the pressure threatening to give her a migraine fades to a dull reminder of the fact that her Mistress has passed her over, probably in favor of having sex. Right now. Upstairs. The thought makes her fingers clench, tightly. She forces her fingers to relax, but they go back to their former position like a rubber band that has been pulled too far and will never again be as it was.

She lets out a soft sigh, pressing her fingers to the bridge of her nose. The smell of Mindfang’s perfume is still on her, somehow, the faintest traces of it rising up around her when she breathes. It’s offensively enduring, as stubborn as the woman is herself.

The concierge turns to face Rosa once more. She looks oddly comforting in her uniform, cleanly starched navy sateen with brass buttons and a nametag that clearly marks out her name and position. Straightforward-- that's what she is. Straightforwardly comforting; she's being paid to assist the guests and that's what she's doing.

"Don't get along with the Marquise's Kismesis?" She asks, softly, sympathetic.

Rosa considers how to answer this question. She has no idea what lies Mindfang has been telling; she’s clearly unwilling to go ‘yes, this is my slave, I keep her around so I don’t get bored when there’s no piracy to be had’. For all Rosa knows, they’re old school friends. Or matesprits. Or total strangers who had arranged a one night stand. She settles for the ever-applicable question "Pardon
"The Marquise is a familiar patron. She and the Orphaner meet up here whenever they're in the area," She shrugs and smiles. "We're a little too far north for too much law enforcement to reach us."

"Well. That explains that, at least." Rosa mutters. She hasn't stopped bitching about the cold all week. She gives Rosa a quick look over, her eyes going from the tips of her horns to the tips of her shoes in a couple of seconds.

"You don't look like her type," She says, in a voice that's not cruel or dismissive, but neutrally earnest. "I've never seen her in love before. Or, come to think of it, with a woman. You're an improvement, on both accounts."

"Don't say that." Rosa whispers, her voice tremulous as if she's nothing more than a crystal orb dangling from a filigree chain, ready to fall at any moment.

"Oh?" Her eyebrows rise. "I'm terribly sorry, I didn't mean to assume but--"

"I don't think we are anymore after the evening we've just had," Rosa says, quietly. It's an awfully presumptive implication, but she doesn't hesitate to assert it. Is she in love? She doesn't know. Probably not. She's infatuated at best, which she supposes still allows her some degree of liberty.

"Well. I hope not. She'd be a good woman if she had someone to police her." The concierge shrugs. "Bit like a wild dog, that one."

"Thank you for the tea," Rosa says, finally, forcing herself to stand. She carefully adjusts her scarf around her coat. "...If the Marquise asks about me, would you mind not telling her I stopped by?"

"Of course, Madam." She grins a little and bows. Rosa smiles back as best as she can and rushes off into the darkness.

* * *

Rosa spends a good half hour wandering the streets in an attempt to harness her emotions. A good part of her wants to run away but the rest of her knows she's already chosen the Widow as her home and Mindfang as her keeper.

She finds her way back to the ship without much difficulty. The ship is silent and almost dead, but there's noise coming from the hold and lamp burning in the map room.

Rosa makes a beeline for her cabin, where someone has, quite thoughtfully, left a few spare quilts neatly folded at the foot of her bed. She shuts the door and attempts to lock it but since the room was designed to keep her in it, it's not much use. She sticks a hairpin into the lock, anyways, in the off hope that it will make things inconvenient.

She huddles up in a nest of blankets and wishes she were bold enough to steal some of Mindfang's wine and drink herself to sleep because at the moment there isn't any way sleep will claim her naturally. Instead she makes herself cozy, and tries not to think too hard about anything. It's easier than she remembers to make her mind a totally blank slate, lit by nothing more than the need not to think about it.

Several hours must have passed before Rosa hears activity outside. It's clearly Mindfang because she hears the sound of feminine heels and then Mindfang's voice calling out to several of her sailors. A door opens, closes, opens again and she shouts:

"Where is she!?!" Then there's another door opening. Rosa assumes she storms into the map room to
ask Marcus where she is, because seconds later Mindfang is trying her doorknob. The jammed lock apparently weaves the successful illusion of being locked because, without so much as asking ‘Can you let me in?’, Mindfang shoulders the door open. Rosa braces herself for yelling.

But instead of the angry shouting she’d expected, she only hears heavy, nervous breathing. Eventually Mindfang lets out a soft whine and Rosa snarls back. It's a satisfying role reversal, but she's too angry to be amused by it.

"Talk to me, Pet," She begs, quietly, and Rosa hears her step closer. "At least look at me."

She doesn't. Revenge is petty, but still pretty damn satisfying.

Mindfang crosses the tiny cabin and nudges her, softly, in the back. Rosa curls up even more tightly beneath the blankets and ignores her. Mindfang nudges her again, then again, then again drops onto the bed beside her. Rosa doesn’t appreciate the infringement of her personal space, but isn’t about to break her silence just to complain.

"Rosa, don't be mad," She mumbles, her voice barely discernible through the duvet. "I-- I shouldn't have tried to upset you."

"You did, though," Rosa snaps, lashing out at her from beneath the blankets. "And you can't take it back. So don't try to tell me you didn't mean it--"

"I meant it. I'm not a good person! I'm mean, I'm awful, I'm two-faced-- I know it." And she's proud of it. "But that-- that doesn't mean I don't know when I've been needlessly cruel."

When Rosa fails to acknowledge this touching apology, Mindfang loses patience and reaches beneath the blankets. She drags Rosa into her arms, resolutely ignoring the fact that she’s covering her arms in scratches that leave her bleeding blue. Rosa eventually gives up, recognizing that mere bodily harm won’t gain her anything. The moment she stills, Mindfang grabs her by the chin, forces her head back and-- without preamble--

Kisses her. Kisses her violently, trying to pull her in even closer. Rosa tries to twist away but she keeps pressing forward and they end up on the deck with a slam of skulls and horns. Mindfang lands beneath her, taking the brunt of the fall, but still doesn't release her. It’s underhanded. Almost despicable, actually. Rosa’s angry, but her feelings are so undecided that just kissing her again is enough to tip the scales in Mindfang’s favor.

Mindfang keeps kissing her until she stops struggling and kisses her back. Rosa resignedly curls her arms around Mindfang’s waist and doesn't flinch when Mindfang twists her fingers into the collar of her dress.

She can feel tears streaming down her face. Whether they're hers or her Mistress’, she doesn't know. What she does know is that Mindfang is shaking like an orphaned leaf and can't seem to hold on to her properly, repeatedly adjusting her grip on Rosa’s dress. This isn’t fair. It’s not fair to take advantage of her like this. Mindfang has to know that Rosa’s too afraid to hold a grudge right now. She has to know that, doesn’t she? That she’s imposing on Rosa’s better nature? Upon reflection, Rosa realizes that-- chances are-- Mindfang does not know this.

"If you ever, if you ever do that to me again, I will leave you." Rosa vows when Mindfang finally pulls away, crawling up to her knees. "I don't care what you say. You're not queen of the universe."

For once, Mindfang doesn't have a retort. She stares up at her and then nods, with her lips pursed.

* * *
Mindfang is too intoxicated to return to her cabin unassisted. Rosa helps her as best as she can, but all she can manage is to haul her onto the bed.

Marcus is the one to hoist her, bridal style, into his arms and carry her back to her own cabin. Rosa follows, fretting over Mindfang as if nothing had happened between them just a few hours before.

"What did he do to you?" Rosa murmurs, frowning, as Marcus settles her onto the bed. She sits on the edge of the mattress and brushes a few tendrils of matted hair out of Mindfang’s face.

Her fingertips come away smudged with blood, blue and violet.

"Sex. A lot of sex," Mindfang says, almost dreamily. "Really rough sex, too. Felt great, let me tell you--"

Rosa sighs, heavily, and rolls her eyes. Mindfang stops talking abruptly and gives her a sheepish look.

"Full honesty? Might have brought you along to piss him off more than to make you mad. He's a helluva lot more fun in bed when he’s--"

"I don't want to hear that, Mistress." Rosa mutters, helping her out of her coat. Marcus, who is hovering in the doorway, clears his throat.

"Perhaps we should cast off, Captain?" He says, when Rosa turns to face him. "If the Admiral is in the area, the Legislacerators won't be far behind."

"Mmmm, I guess so." Mindfang says after a pause that's a little too long. "G'head. I-- I think you can handle it."

"Of course, Captain." He makes a face at Rosa but it's clearly intended as an expression of camaraderie instead of mockery. Rosa smiles back.

"I'm sorry I suck at this," Mindfang says, her voice slow and shaky. She nuzzles at Rosa's neck and huddles up beneath her blankets a little more until she looks like nothing more than a pair of horns sticking out from underneath a mass of silk and down, a single arm exposed.

Rosa can't help but laugh because, quite honestly, she looks a little like a badger in a burrow, nothing more than a pair of eerily blue eyes shining out of the darkness of her makeshift cave. A pretty badger, though. She won't begrudge her that.

"I-- I'm not comfortable with happiness. And you're so wonderful, Pet-- just-- wonderful and kind and patient--" She's trying to get out from beneath the blankets now, and isn't very successful. She almost manages to send herself flying to the floor, but Rosa tugs her back before disaster can make itself known.

"Don't want to hear it." Rosa repeats, purposefully catching Mindfang in the ribcage with her elbow. "Go to sleep."

Mindfang harrumphs and flops over. Rosa sighs, heavily, and curls up at her back. She falls asleep after only a few minutes, clearly too exhausted and far too intoxicated to remain conscious for too long.

When she’s finally deep, deep within the constraints of sleep, Rosa carefully slips out of the bed. She wants to be alone more than she wants to be of comfort to Mindfang; lying there watching her breathe the peaceful sleep of an unburdened conscience is far too much to bear; if she remains here,
she'll end up wrapping her arms around her Mistress's neck and strangling her.

The deck is a buzz of activity when she slips outside. The sailors are racing around the decks preparing the Widow to set sail, and Marcus is far too busy at the bridge to acknowledge her.

She makes her way to the stern of the ship and stares out at the dock bustling with evening activity behind them. The lights of the city are burning like pinpoints of light in the darkness, and she's incredibly glad to know there's the warmth of a cabin and the heaviness of a fur lined coat on her back because as she stares out into the distance it begins to snow.

The snow falls fast but gracefully, settling on the deck of the ship like morning dew and forming a graceful mantle of silvery white across her head and shoulders. She's never seen the snow before and, as they set sail a quarter hour later, she's still marveling at it with tears in her eyes.

Her baby would have loved this. He always wanted to see the snow-- so had she, but she'd never said as much because, really, letting him know he wasn't alone in his wonderment would only make his curiosity worse.

She doesn’t know why she’s so upset. If Mindfang had said ‘come help me make my kismesis jealous’ Rosa wouldn’t have minded. Much. She would like to be furious right now, but her anger is tinted by guilt. Her jealousy was disproportionate to anything she’d ever experienced.

It's just... well... Rosa doesn't have anyone anymore. No one but Mindfang. Mindfang is her best friend, worst enemy, most frightening adversary, her worst nightmare-- she's Rosa's world, now. And the fact that Mindfang has an entire ocean of memories, acquaintances, homes, commitments, people to love--

It makes her feel as if she doesn't matter. But Mindfang left her Kismesis to apologize and that's something, she supposes. She left a night of what seems to be incredibly rewarding sex to crawl into Rosa's bed and apologize.

It was a shitty apology but, well-- it was still a start, isn’t it?

Rosa stands vigil as they pull away from the docks, ignoring the cold wind that begins to bite at her face once they’re on the open ocean. She doesn't know how long they’ve been sailing when Marcus walks up beside her and places a hand between her shoulderblades. She gives him a small smile and he salutes back.

"M'am." He murmurs, stuffing his hands into his pockets. His pristine purple coat is dusted in a layer of snow, brass buttons covered in frost. His white hair looks almost normal in this weather, as if he simply had his head frozen solid. "You look awfully pensive this evening."

"I’m fine. Just needed a bit of fresh air."

"...May I be quite frank with you, Rosa?" He asks, softly, leaning on the railing beside her. She can't recollect if he's used her name before, but it's nice to hear him say it. Are they friends? She hopes they're friends.

"Of course, Marcus."

"The Admiral is a total douchebag and if I had my way I would light him on fire and dye his hair to a normal color. And I would like to apologize on Mindfang's behalf if she treated you poorly just to illustrate a point to him."

"...Can I help you torture him before we dump his body?"
Marcus laughs and, before Rosa can react, he's hugging her tightly. He's big and muscular and it's unnerving to have a man's arms around her once more. He's bigger than her son, and decidedly less gangly than the other boy and she's unused to how it feels.

But she hugs him back all the same.

"I'll have a word with her when she wakes up." He says gruffly, giving her a firm pat on the back. "Just... you know. We've all been there. So don't... don't do anything rash."

He gives her a concerned look and Rosa blinks back at him without understanding. He stares back at her and there's an awkward moment of silence.

"I, um, was just planning on going back to bed and refusing to talk to her until she’s grovelled." Rosa says, laughing awkwardly and wrapping her arms around herself. "Is that too rash?"

"Oh. Oh, no it isn't." He shrugs and Rosa makes a mental note to knit him a scarf because the exposed stretch of skin between his collarbones and chin is making the mother in her incredibly nervous. "I'd best be getting back to tending the ship. Let me-- let me know if you need anything, Miss Rosa. Don't stay out here too long, Miss; you're likely to catch a chill."

He stalks back to the bridge and Rosa watches him go feeling more than a little better about the world around her. The moon is scattering silver stripes across the blackened water and as snow falls around them it feels almost like a fairytale. She remains there undisturbed long after the rest of the crew has gone below decks, leaving only Marcus at the wheel.

She can't stop staring, breathing in the cold night air as if it's straight vodka, the warmth and then the chill spreading through all her limbs.

It's almost as if she's wandering the caverns once more only to wend her way back to the ever present flame to stare into its depths.

Eventually, noise begins to pick up behind her and she rises from her reverie long enough to wonder if, perhaps, she can stomach crawling back into bed beside Mindfang. There's some shouting that she doesn't quite understand and then a hand curls around her shoulder.

"I was just about to head in Marcus," She says without turning to look because they must be changing watches and he'd hardly dare to leave her here unattended. "Should I wake up the captain?"

"There's no need," He says, but his voice is rumbling like an oncoming storm that's hell-bent on raising a tempest and--

She turns, sharply, but not sharply enough to confirm her suspicions before a hand is wrapped tightly around her mouth and the blade of something sharp is pressed to her throat.

Well. This certainly isn't Marcus.

And then her head is slammed into the railing with hideous force, so hard she sees ultraviolet and tastes chartreuse. Then, without further warning--

Black.
or, why sometimes a lesser evil isn't really that much of an evil.

Chapter Summary

Dualscar is a terrible human being, but Mindfang isn't much better but at least she cares, right?

Chapter Notes

Yeah this was a rough one to write. Thought it was my moral obligation to fix my cliffhanger >: hope it's okay.

The Dolorosa wakes up to a foul smell beneath her nose. She's immediately brought back to consciousness with the mind-jarring recollection that something is horribly wrong. After all, Mindfang would never allow her to fall asleep on the floor, especially not without putting a blanket over her or a pillow beneath her neck.

And then her thoughts immediately jump to Marcus and she prays to any higher power that might still be watching out for her that Mindfang won't kill him.

She doesn't want to open her eyes but she forces herself to do it all the same. She stares up at the ceiling of a room made of steel. It's not right, not right at all, to make a ship out of metal. How can it be a home when it's so unforgiving? Even with the scent of smelling salts poisoning her nasal cavities she knows there won't be the homey smell of wood polish and beeswax anywhere, nor will there be the pungent odor of tar patching the hold and there certainly won't be the scent of jasmine caught on a sea breeze or the freshness of lavender on the sheets because-- well-- she's reasonably sure she won't be welcomed into the Orphaner's bed.

When she finally forces herself to look at him, he's starkly terrifying. Violet framed by furrowed, Faustian brows, the queer dichotomy of black hair against purple highlights and the hideous breakage of scar tissue stretching across the expanse of his face. He's standing over her like an angry shadow, unmoving and almost like a moving sepulcher, waiting to embrace his newest resident.

He looks down at her completely impassively, as if he's examining a particularly uninteresting piece of newspaper detailing the news of a place removed from him by thousands of miles. It's a look she remembers by instinct. It's the way that traders would look at her while striding through the market, evaluating the worth of every half-pound of flesh on her bones. He's got the face of a man used to this sort of thing, used to passing over hundreds of dollars simply to-- well-- do lord knows what with a living carcass.

"Good evening." He says, primly, arching an eyebrow.

"Go to hell." She growls, bracing herself instinctively, just in time for his booted foot to make sharp contact with her ribs.

Oh hell does that hurt. She wheezes, loudly and lets out a keening moan of utter agony. It's worth it though because, well, he looks angry now and that's as much gratification as she needs.
"There's two ways we can go about this," He says, his voice falsely cheerful given the circumstances— at least, she hopes its false cheer, because anyone who would take actual pleasure in this exchange is absolutely horrifying.

He stares down at her, blankly, and she stares back up just as blankly.

"She knows something. And I need to know what that something is," Dualscar says, glaring down at her like she's a minor inconvenience instead of a woman doing her best not to scream every time she takes a breath.

"Thank you so much for your clarity, I certainly know what you're talking about." She replies, all the same, forcing herself to sound polite and courteous.

He lunges at her and she tries to scramble to her feet, run to the door and-- do, what, exactly? Jump overboard?

But it's not at all important because he grabs her and throws her to the ground once more and before she can process what is going to happen he has his booted foot on her wrist and steps down, hard and she feels the bones of her wrist give out as if they're nothing more than stale kindling and she screams, fighting desperately to pull her now useless hand from beneath his foot, feet scrabbling across the slick metal of the deck beneath her but he keeps pressing down until she can't do anything but retch and sob and beg for him to stop--

"I have plans that I cannot afford to have screwed up by an overzealous Kismesis who seems to think that everything on this fucking planet is her business," He growls, glaring down at her. "And if you can tell me what she knows about those plans, we can see about getting you someplace, far, far away from here."

Rosa stares up at him through eyes that are already hazy from pain and fails to form a sentence. There's several things incorrect about his assumptions, first and foremost the fact that she's willing to go anywhere but back to Mindfang's ship and secondly, that Mindfang trusts her with anything more important than ensuring her clothes get folded the proper way.

"Just tell me where she's going and this can all be over," He tries again, his voice a little softer and she would really like to inform him that trying to manipulate her won't go over well, especially since she's been sleeping beside a woman who doesn't nothing but manipulate for a good two months now--

"I don't know anything," She says, truthfully, because all she knows about Mindfang's life is what she's been able to read in her journals from decades ago and that can't be of any use to him.

That's not good enough, however, and his face grows dark once more. "Do you think I would feel any guilt at all over murdering you?" He hisses, and she stares back and then, against all odds, laughs.

"You think you'll get something from her by hurting me?" Rosa hisses, ignoring how much it hurts to take in enough breath to respond to him. "I amuse her. Nothing more."

He snarls and his voice is worse than the sound of an approaching storm. Carried out his wordless fury is the weight of the empire, the stomping of thousands of feet in unison, the approach of an army of men and woman ready to burn her alive. She cowers and tries to lunge away from him, but he still has her by the hair and isn't about to let go.

When she attempts to struggle to her feet once more, his foot cracks into her ribcage and she can't take a deep enough breath to scream anymore. She simply collapses, gagging and retching and
praying that she'll begin to die so that this can't continue any longer.

But she's furious, all the same. Jealous, angry, threatened-- she can't stop thinking about Mindfang long enough to allow the severity of her situation to sink in.

"And judging by the fact that I reside with her, I must be doing a far better job than you," She wheezes, digging trenches into her own skin in an attempt to manage the pain and it doesn't work but her words are enough to send him into a rage and after throwing her clear across the room he throws open his cabin door and barks orders.

"Perhaps you'll be a little more cooperative after you've spent an evening with your peers down in the hold," He growls, hauling her off the ground by her horns and she screeches but he doesn't even wince at the sound-- as if he's heard it a thousand times before and will hear it a thousand times more.

And there's something familiar in that passivity that makes memories long forced into dormancy start to spark back to life but before she can think about it she's being wrestled down to the hold. During the fight to get her chained she's eventually bludgeoned, hard, across the back of her head and for the second time in an hour she finds herself unconscious and deathly afraid.

* * *

The slave hold on Dualscar's ship is worse than any of her darkest imaginations. On her most dreadful day she imagined a tiny three by three cell, her hands and ankles shackled, a collar around her neck and bars before her. Perhaps one or two others. That's what it was like in confinement at the slave market, after all.

But she's rapidly being forced to realize, even gagged and bound and given barely enough to survive, she was spoiled. Absolutely spoiled. Spoiled by having enough room to shift around, enough slack to cross her legs, enough attention that someone brought her wine-- water spoiled too rapidly-- at least once a day-- and above all, spoiled because she was being preserved for her looks. She was beautiful, that was her selling point. Beautiful and rare. Those two things combined made her a rarity and they treated her as such. Well treated, she was not. But abused? Terrorized? Left for dead? Perhaps the first two. However, there was always a bottom line to look after.

Here, three decks below an iron behemoth crewed by far fewer men than Mindfang's smaller ship, there is barely enough room to breathe, and certainly not enough room to stand, crammed in on racks like they're seafood. They're chained together in lines, not pairs, and one person's movement shifts them all. The air is hot and disgustingly dirty, making each breath an agonizing decision.

Gaining consciousness down there the hardest thing she's ever done. It makes her realize instantly just how spoiled she's been since becoming a slave. It may be shallow, but she thanks the highest powers for the fact that she's pretty and that Mindfang is lazy enough to purchase her company. Then she begins to wonder if she can even be called a slave at all, since she'd being kept for nothing more than Mindfang's pleasure-- innocent as it may be-- and decides as soon as she gets back she'll petition to have her title changed to concubine.

When she opens her eyes, it's to a splitting headache and a sense of overwhelming nausea. There isn't enough room to move, let alone sit up. She's cramped in beside two others, slouched over beneath what appears to be a wall covered in benches. It's dark-- so dark she can't see her feet before her. It's agony to breath, the air foul with the smell of suffering and far too many people crammed in beside one another. There's more slaves down here than there are sailors on Mindfang's ship-- and that's saying something. It's unbearably hot, it's humid and all around her she can hear plaintive whimpering and occasional screeches of agony.
Down here-- surrounded by the heat and agony of at least a hundred others-- she's all too well aware of how easy she's had it since her son's death. Not easy, perhaps, but how lucky she's been. 20 months in a slave market? Terrible. No one should have to suffer through that for so long. But this? No. No, this is absolutely unacceptable. If she had the option, she'd be more than happy to kill every last soul in the room simply to alleviate their suffering. Because well----

While this might be hell on earth, she has hope. It's a slim hope, of course because why would Mindfang come for her but-- well--

She hardly seems the type to allow the Orphaner to gain the upper hand. And that's her hope. That her need to be the best will overcome her distaste for exerting herself. She's not expecting to be saved for the sake of being saved, no-- that's asking too much of the universe. But, perhaps, the hope of being saved for the sake of spiting the violet-hued asshole above decks will appease the gods?

That's an acceptable hope. Despite herself, she narrows her eyes and sneers.

He's totally going to get his ass handed to him.

* * *

The second night of her stay on the ship, she's brought to his cabin once more and, again, he attempts to interrogate her. The urge to make him angry is grappling with herself preservation and she ends up giving him a mixture of responses that are haphazardly thrown together and make little sense.

The only piece of knowledge she has is that they're going someplace warmer after this, because she's heard Mindfang grumbling about that enough, but both she and Dualscar know that anywhere is warmer than where they are now.

He tries shouting at her, bribing her, cajoling her and beating her, all the while failing to understand that she's in possession of no more knowledge about the subject than he himself is. She tries to reason with him, to explain that he's already broken her wrist and bruised her ribs and possibly done some serious internal damage, why would she continue withholding information? But he doesn't listen to her.

Who does he think he's hurting by keeping her here? Mindfang can hardly notice her absence, save for the fact she has more time to get work done, now, without a nuisance sitting in her armchair asking her impertinent questions. Still, the interrogation goes on for hours, Dualscar seemingly incapable of understanding that she doesn't know jack shit-- his words, not hers, but she finds them uniquely appropriate so she 'commandeers' them.

She can't even tell him what the map room looks like, let alone where they're bound for. Someplace warmer is all she can sob as he threatens to rip her lungs from her still heaving chest. Someplace warmer, she repeats like it's a mantra that will keep him at bay. He curses her to high heaven for her devotion and she spits at him 'it's hardly devotion when you don't have any information to begin with' and that's when he slams her face into the wall so hard she blacks out.

* * *

On the third night there, she's dragged up from the hold once more, this time without nearly as much struggle. When she's thrown onto the floor of his cabin, she's almost too broken to haul herself to her feet. But she forces her broken wrist, now swollen horribly and mottled purple and black, to bear her weight and she stands.

Her legs are trembling beneath her because he doesn't even turn to admire her attempt at strength and she doesn't like that at all but if it makes her feel a little less pathetic, a little less worthless, she'll make herself do it.
As she clings to the back of the couch in a pathetic attempt to support herself, he turns to face her and *she knows why she remembers him*. It's a recollection that hits her worse than a bullet and her legs give out beneath her.

As he stands there, silhouetted by the fire like he's a figure ripped straight from the pages of a mythology text, she remembers him. He looks like he's about to call down the rage of an entire mountain to punish the mortals of the planet below and *she knows where she's seen him*.

He had been the one standing beside her, solemn and fierce in the face of the Empress's condescending boredom with the whole affair. He'd been the one that had wrapped his arms around her shoulders and clung, tightly, when she'd begun to collapse, when her throat was hoarse from screaming--

He'd stood beside her and said, softly, "I don't think you should watch this." And when she hadn't heard him because all she could see or hear or feel was her son being led out to his death-- He'd sighed, heavily, and snapped at the Empress beside him:

"This is cruel." And she'd replied, "She started it" and in the back the Heiress had grumbled something like "Wow, you're kind of a bitch" and when a scuffle had broken out between the two women he had sworn, loudly, and pulled her close to his chest in an attempt to keep her from seeing at her son was led out by rusted chains--

"I'm so sorry," He had repeated over and over when she'd collapsed, screaming, screaming and fighting to get to him and when he had finally----

Finally left them, he had been the one to carry her back into the courthouse, settle her in someone's office and try to calm her and he was ultimately the one to call for her to be sedated when she couldn't stop screaming long enough to breathe anymore.

And as she stands there, glowering up at him, she sort of hates him for it. Because it's clear that although she may remember him and his kindness to her on the worst day of her life and he can't remember anything more than that he met her the night before, nothing more than a pawn to raise his ire.

It's that more than the fact that she's about to be brutally tortured that makes her break down. She stares at him, blankly, and simply says:

"I don't matter."

He doesn't remember her at all. That's how much of an impact she made. He's nothing more than a nice man who's allowed his temper to get the best of him. And he's probably going to torture her, interrogate her and then, quite possibly murder her brutally, and then he'll sort of forget about it until Mindfang discovers what he's done and refuses to speak to him for a few weeks--

That's if she remembers she's lost her. Given how they left things, she probably won't even bother to worry. If Dualscar can't at all recollect the only grieving mother he's ever met, she can't-- she can't matter at all.

"Do what you want with me," She whispers, her voice snapping like a piece of twine that's been asked to bear weight beyond its capacity.

"You're worthless," He hisses, grabbing her by the hair and pulling her to her feet and she doesn't even have enough spirit left within her to scream. She stares into his eyes and tries to let the sight of him remind her of everything she's *lost*.
"I know," She responds, because there isn't anything she can really say to the truth other than affirm it.

Dualscar stares back at her with a frown etched in his brow. She blinks back at him as if this is a perfectly normal way to conduct a conversation.

"She knows something. And I need to know what that something is."

"You're the one who said I was worthless," She whispers, her voice trembling a little as she does so. He stares at her and then, with a hiss, releases her. She crumples on the floor just in time for his foot to make sharp contact with her ribcage.

"Why are you doing this?" Rosa gasps, forcing herself to breathe through the pain. She's doing her best to rile up her pride, stir herself into a sense of indignation instead of blistering fear.

But she's afraid, she's so afraid. She can't remember this sort of fear taking hold of her ever before, not the day she was taken into the Empress's custody, not the day she was handed into slavery, not even the day she was sold.

In every one of those situations, she was-- well-- in control, somehow. In control because she had nothing to lose; in control because she'd chosen not to care. There's nothing to be afraid of, after all, when your child is dead and you have nothing else left in the world to call your own.

The Orphaner is cold. She would like to say heartless but she's seen his passion. She's seen his pride and his fire and there's no way she can pretend he's nothing more than a soulless bastard. But he's still cold and controlled, masterful over his emotions in a way that Mindfang could only ever dream of. There isn't so much as a twitching muscle in his face as he stares down at her. And she wants to say it's because he has no capacity to feel in him, none at all. She wants to say he's missing a heart or that his sea dwelling body isn't capable of such feeling but--

But she's seen the way he looks at the woman he's black for. He had stared at Mindfang with absolute, unabashed devotion-- a dark, brooding devotion but devotion nonetheless. There's someone alive, someone loving and insecure and moronic down there behind his stupid ugly face and his tacky cape. And as much as she wants to hate him-- as much as she wants to assume he's nothing more than pure, unadulterated horrible... she can't.

Her son might be gone but her memories of him aren't and-- well-- if he had enough faith in the world that he invited the execution squad sent to murder him inside for tea-- She can look her Mistress's Kismesis in the eye and do her best to remember that he is, in fact, a fellow being with hopes and dreams just like hers. Except, perhaps, hopes and dreams that are a little... darker. And more murderous in intent.

"To teach her a lesson." He murmurs, tapping the brand against the grate of the fireplace. The sound of the iron against iron is like a funeral knell and she flinches. It's almost impossible to suppress her need to scream at the sight of it-- white hot metal that steams as the air meets it. "And, well, I can't have her being happy, can I?"

"I think you're missing the point." Rosa mutters and he turns on her with a vicious snarl, dropping the brand back into the heat of the flames in favor of kicking her, savagely, in the stomach. This time, at the least, he misses her ribs. But she falls onto the deck with a scream and a choked gasp of horrified pain. Her eyes go painfully wide and she curls up into herself in the hopes that he won't try it again.

"I see she never bothered to teach you your place," He hisses, and she hears the tapping of metal on
metal again. "How... surprising."

"You're a bastard." She hisses, struggling and then failing to sit up. She wants to be anywhere but here right now. A slave market, the desert, the caverns underground-- anywhere but here in a cabin that's made of metal and feels like a cheap coffin, with nothing more than a bed that's far too ornate for the space and computer equipment that looks a little too high tech.

It smells like gasoline and motor oil instead of the warmth of wood polish and rum like Mindfang's Widow. The scent of metal in the air is enough to make her gag.

She wants to crawl into Mindfang's bed and pull the covers over her head, to surround herself in the smell of lavender linen water and the faintest traces of jasmine perfume. She wants to feel a pair of strong arms wrap around her waist and pull her close to a chest that's soft, firm and incredibly welcoming.

But instead she's lying on the metallic floor of a warship with her body screaming for mercy. Her head is swimming from the blow she received just a few minutes before when he shoved her to the ground and now she's reasonably sure she's broken a rib. And Dualscar's still standing before the fire with his fingers curled around the handle of a branding iron.

Rosa doesn't know which one of them moves first. She has no way of telling, really, because she can't remember a moment of the actual process or the moment when the brand met the flesh of her shoulder.

Because all she can think of is her baby, up there all alone in this much pain his skin frying off of his bones as he screams for mercy and dissolves into rage, giving up everything he ever stood for and LETTING THAT BITCH WIN by surrendering and listening to his flesh sizzle away--

She sobs. She sobs like the day she lost him, tears ripping their way from her lungs so frantically that she can't breathe and it frightens him. Sobbing, perhaps, isn't the right word for it. She's screaming like a banshee come to tell him he's going to die. It frightens him half to death and she can tell because-- well-- he starts to panic.

He does everything he can to force her to stop, hauling her off of the ground by her hair again, shaking her back and forth, slamming her into the wall until she's so disoriented that she stops screaming because she's heartbroken and starts screaming because she's sure she's going to die--

Her voice runs out before his determination to kill her does. Soon enough she's trying to scream with a throat that's stripped raw and sound won't come out anymore—

And that's when she smells her own burned flesh again and is promptly incredibly sick all over the floor. And then faints because, well, it really seems like a much better alternative to staying conscious long enough to react.

* * *

And just like her time spent on Mindfang's ship, things start to take on a horrible routine. The slaves are dragged out on deck only after the day's work is done and while the rest of them are forced to pace the deck, back and forth-- swaying from exhaustion-- Rosa is separated. Separated and brought to Dualscar.

He doesn't change much from their third encounter. Except for the fact that she's reasonably sure she's going to go insane. Because every time she sees him she starts to laugh until she cries because this is so fucked up and it unsettles him to the point where he kicks her in the ribs and screams for her to stop but oh god she can't help it. Something breaks this time and she feels agony spear through her
body with each breath.

Orphaner, huh? It's a little too late for that. She wants to tell him he's already missed the opportunity to orphan anyone since he already killed her child—

Mindfang doesn't appear the next day. The only thing that happens to her that day is that she adds a slight concussion to her snapped wrist and bruised ribs, and on the day after that she manages to find herself in need of stitches.

She doesn't receive stitches, however, and it doesn't seem as if any of her companions are cognizant enough to worry about disease or infection. She finds a part of her dress that's not too filthy and wraps it around her slashed forearm as best as she can.

The only thing the other slaves seem to understand is to be afraid of their owner. Master is not the term she'd use for him, not at all. To refer to him as such would place him on par with Mindfang, place him at a level of respect that he in no way merits.

He commands fear, not respect, and his ship is populated by men who are afraid to look him in the eye.

As she ties off her makeshift bandage with a grimace, contorting her fractured wrist at an angle that's close to what she would define 'excruciating' she lets out a huff.

Yes, they know fear. They know fear and subservience but they know nothing of loyalty and courage and devotion and-- well-- she'll be damned if she's not doing her level best to stay sane by constantly reminding herself she's above all this.

Classes among slaves, she muses, her eyes welling up as she stares at the ceiling before her and tries not to breathe through her nose. My son would be ashamed to see how far I've fallen.

But it's true, she supposes. She might not have been born to slavery, she might not aspire to slavery but-- well-- it's the die she's been cast for the moment and she's more than willing to make as much of it as she can. And if the only way she can do that is to cling to the idea that as Mindfang's personal slave she's somehow better than the rest of these poor damned creatures, crammed in like starfish on a coral reef, she'll do it.

It puts a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach, true, but-- she'll manage. She'll manage until Mindfang comes for her and then she'll make amends to the rest of the world. But, still, Mindfang does not come for her on the fourth, or the sixth, or the ninth day and as she racks up injuries-- "I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING, PLEASE OH GOD PLEASE-- I CAN'T-- NO MORE OH GOD PLEASE” and the smell of her own singed flesh filling the air once more--hope begins to dwindle.

It takes all of eleven days for her to give up hope. Eleven days, it would seem, is her limit. She counts to eleven, marking scrapes into the ship's foul lower deck as best she can with her nails, an action that becomes more and more difficult as she racks up injury after injury. She counts to eleven and that's when the fight leaves her.

Eleven eleven eleven oh god eleven. More than ten days she's been down here, praying for a glimpse of the sky, praying that Dualscar will give up and finally believe her because if she didn't know anything the first day why should she know now--

It's hopeless.

She's been abandoned.
Again.

* * *

On the twelfth morning, she awakes with dull eyes and a dead heart. Abandoned, yes, that's what she is. Over and over and over again. Left alone, alone with nothing but her guilty conscience and an aching heart. At least with her darling little boy it wasn't a choice. He wouldn't have left her-- none of her little ones would have. They were torn from her arms like a wave ripping shells off of the shore. But Mindfang? Mindfang has no excuse.

Rosa doesn't like being alone. She's never been alone, not ever. Not as a child, when her lusus never left her side, not as an adolescent in the heart of the caverns surrounded by the newborns and the Sisters, not even as an adult as she traversed desert sands with a squalling bundle tied to her bosom. No, she's never been alone, not ever. Always had something to live for, something to keep her going. You can't die, Rosa, your Lusus must die first, you can't die, Rosa, the babies need you, you can't die Rosa you have a son now, you can't die, Rosa, they won't let you, you can't die Rosa--

Your Mistress will miss you.

The sobs rise without warning, absolutely unbidden. She's so exhausted at this point and so far beyond caring that she cries unabashedly, the sound filling the slave hold like the howls of a lone wolf desperately searching for her pack. Oh god she's alone, she's a failure and she's alone, no one to care if she lives or dies, no one relying on her, no one needing her--

What is she without someone to need her? She needs someone to need her. She's no one without someone to-- well, not someone to serve, but someone to tend to. She needs to be a necessity. Being necessary is her life's blood, her only solace.

Never once has anyone turned to her and said: "it's okay dear, I can manage on my own". Except for-- well-- Mindfang. Who quite literally just wants her around for her entertainment value. And it would appear that after a few encounters with her slave's truest face she's found her... lacking.

Oh god she's useless. She's useless and abandoned and going to die all alone--

She's still crying when the hold door cracks open. It's Dualscar, she can tell by the thud of boots on the floor and the way the rest of the slaves shy away from her, the women chained to her lunging away so quickly Rosa feels their chains yanked.

"I might as well leave you down here to die, huh?" He snarls, spitting at her feet. She doesn't kick him, because kicking him would inadvertently cause everyone down here some sort of tragedy. But she sure as hell wants to.

"Useless." He scoffs when she doesn't get a reaction from her.

"I don't need to be reminded." She mutters, still glaring for all she's worth, which isn't much. He's amused by this, clearly, and snorts.

"Ready to tell me what the fuck she's up to?" He says with a smirk that's just this side of unacceptable, crossing his arms and tilting his head back. Imperious, that's the word for it. He's imperious.

"Your language is incredibly crass for someone of your breeding." Is all she says, blotting her tears with the tattered hem of her dress. "I'm horrified this is what our society is coming to."

"TELL ME WHAT SHE'S DOING."
"I have a better idea," She hisses, bearing her own teeth which she knows are still as sharp and shining as the day she was locked down here, because she can feel their points when she licks her dry lips. "How about you kiss my ass."

And that's when he breaks three of her ribs with a single kick.

(It's worth it).

* * *

Twelve days becomes thirteen days-- it's impossible to breathe now instead of just unpleasant-- and she's barely conscious. Dualscar has given up, for the moment, and there are no more marks seared into her arm, no more flesh turned a virulent green, no more zigzags scratched across her skin with a white hot needle as she screams.

She traces over the burns with a sadistic urgency, her fingernails digging into the raised welts with a sadism that makes her sick with herself. But the pain reminds her she's not dead quite yet, and it's better than doing nothing but staring into blackness waiting for the Handmaiden to appear.

The fourteenth day, they dock. She knows the sound by the loud clamoring, the shouts and catcalls of sailors excited to make land and the cawing of gulls as they circle overhead. The hold is opened and some sunlight shines through, along with much needed fresh air.

Rosa doesn't savor it. Not in the slightest. She simply continues to trace her scars and revel in the pain, as fleeting as it is.

No one comes for them, even as the day grows long and the sun begins to set. Shesupposes they want to get a chance to rinse everyone down before dragging them all off to market.

But, no, that isn't it. The rest of the slaves are lead off two by two until she’s alone in the hold and she remains there, alone, for what feels like days but is probably hours. She should be glad to see her companions go; they weren’t particularly kind to her, and, all things considered, she was half afraid they’d eat her in her sleep.

Hauled up from the slave hold without an attempt at protest. The lesson from last time is clear: while she might not be bothered by pain, that doesn't mean everyone else isn't. And while they might be slaves, in the same position as she is, that doesn't necessarily make them good people-- nor does it make them bad people. But it does mean that they're less than willing to suffer needlessly. And they’re not above hurting their fellow sufferers in the name of self-preservation. Or, failing that, they’re not above preventing a fellow sufferer from sleeping two nights in a row.

She's exhausted and inches away from broken, her body and soul aching like they were split apart and then flimsily reattached with tape that's already beginning to rip away. All she wants to do is find a dark corner and remain there for years. She wants to cry, cry for hours and months and decades--

Rosa doesn't want to spend another evening tortured by Dualscar. There are, quite obviously, three thousand and one things she'd prefer to do. But struggling is pointless; the guard sent to fetch her is the one that's come for her every night before and he knows better than to allow her any sort of leeway. He has her by the throat the entire way, not letting her do so much as take a step without being yanked along by her manacles.

The exhaustion is not, however, enough to convince her to cease struggling. She fights as best as she can, refusing to walk, refusing to be led until he gives up and throws her over a shoulder. She's not particularly happy about this compromise, mostly because it sends jarring shudders of pain all up and down her body as her ribcage is slammed into an unforgiving shoulder.
He knocks on the door of the Orphaner's cabin with a certain sense of urgency, clearly not wanting to be the one blamed to keep his Master waiting. She wonders how this man would feel if she informed him she has a more exalted position on her own ship. Her Mistress would never make her perform such menial tasks and, well, really, she's more than aware that she'll be lucky enough to sleep in the captain's quarters every night the minute she gets back home.

"Bring it in." Comes a terse voice from the inside. Rosa hisses at the reference to herself as an 'it' and her escort is kind enough to catch the tip of her horn on the door as he shoves it open.

"See? Quit your bitching," The Orphaner snaps the second she's stopped her pained baying. "Calm your heaving bosom you psychotic simpleton."

The sound of his voice makes her begin to keen once more, letting out horrific noises she can't remember knowing how to make but she knows them well enough, the sounds of newborn grubs suffering as they're devoured by their peers. She can't find the courage to stand up or move but she curls in onto herself to protect all the essential parts, kidneys, liver, lungs, heart-- hell, at this point she's willing to sacrifice her reproductive organs to whatever torture he can devise just so long as he doesn't burn her again-- anything but that, anything but the brand, anything, oh god anything--

"So I see you finally learned how to respect my property."

It's a voice that's low and husky yet unbelievably feminine. It's a woman's voice, and a powerful woman's voice at that and Rosa doesn't believe what she's hearing, not even for a moment. Because it's been fourteen days, she knows it's been fourteen days and if she didn't come for her after ten days why would she come now, why? Why--

"Although I don't think you were very good at it," Mindfang murmurs, and there's a distinctly familiar noise of derision. "Honestly. Look at her, poor dove."

"It is fine. It just needs a good hose down, that's all. And preferably proper training. Honestly, Marquise, I hardly have time to be picking up your slack."

It has to be Mindfang. Rosa doesn't open her eyes but she makes a pitiful noise and she hears one of her two companions take a sharp breath. She makes it again, as pleading and pathetic as she can make it and this time she gets what she's looking for, a soft comforting burble of a warm, rich voice--

Rosa inhales through her nose as deeply as she can given her injury and she catches the faintest trace of jasmine in the air. Jasmine and wood polish and the slightest hint of lavender.

Oh god it's her. It's really her. She starts to cry. She starts to cry as desperately as she ever has, fractured rib cage screaming at her for the effort. Her diaphragm feels as if it's tearing but she keeps crying all the same.

Without warning a boot presses against her back. She braces herself for a kick but the foot remains where it is. Rosa forces herself not to pull away and she feels the foot shift a little and realizes it's a pointed toe, a woman's shoe and-- well--

She wonders if this is a phantom way of comforting her. If she could breathe properly she would murmur 'thank you'.

"Don't treat it like a lapdog." Dualscar hisses and she hears a pair of solid, male boots make print onto the floor. Before she can scramble to her knees there's a cruel hand twisting into her hair and pulling her off of the ground and she can't do anything but scream once more.

"Put her down." Mindfang hisses, her voice sharp. "I'm telling you right now, Dualscar, if you hurt
“her once more you will make it your last move.”

Rosa stares up at the ceiling and gasps, gasps hard and it doesn't do her any good but she catches the faintest glimpse of cerulean out of the corner of her eyes and it's enough to help her quiet the worst of her sobs.

They're clearly in the midst of a stare down. She can tell that much from staring up at his face, his eyes sharp and keen in the darkness of the cabin. "Maybe that's what I should do, huh? Kill her now."

“Eadric.” Mindfang hisses, and Rosa doesn't need the thirty seconds she has to process the fact that Mindfang is absolutely furious, her voice distorted beyond recognition. "Eadric if you kill her I will never forgive you."

"Why should that matter? You need to learn, Marquise--" He tugs Rosa's head back, sharply, and she yelps. "That some creatures just aren't worth your time."

Mindfang stares at him, thin lipped and her back ramrod straight. Without warning there's a knife pressed against Dualscar’s throat and a hand has curled around her bad wrist and she howls but Mindfang ignores her—

“Put her down, now, Eadric, and neither of us has to die.” Mindfang whispers, voice shaking with an emotion Rosa can't place. “I may not know how to make that brain of yours work, but you know as well as I do that I will use every single one of your men against you and take this ship down if I have to.”

He stares back at her, his gills fluttering in what Rosa thinks is nervousness. “It might be worth it.”

"Don't be a fool, Eadric," She snaps and for the first time that night her facade breaks. Rosa's elated to see it, even if it means that her fangs are at their fullest and her eyes have gone a queer sort of blue once more. The hand around her wrist tightens and Mindfang digs her knife in just deep enough to draw up a thin line of blood. He chokes and then, suddenly, his hold on her is relaxed. Rosa tumbles into Mindfang's arms.

She sinks onto the couch, tugging Rosa along. Rosa collapses at her feet, pressing her face into the leather of her breeches. She smells like all those wonderful things, lemon oil and expensive perfume and freshly washed clothing--

Her hands knot into Rosa's hair and her fingers start to caress her horns, nails stroking into their grooves. She doesn't look down at her but Rosa can't stop staring up at the solemn lines of her face. It's the most beautiful face she's ever seen, after so many days in darkness.

"Now that we have that settled, Eadric," Mindfang murmurs, shifting just a bit so she can cross her legs. Rosa snuggles into the space between her knees. Mindfang hums in approval and scratches her scalp. "I feel that I owe you a debt of gratitude."

"Don't fuck with me--"

"You kept my poor little girl out of harm's way in the middle of the worst raid of the season. It was such a comfort to know she was safe and sound."

Rosa wants to bite her. But, well, she's still stroking her hair and her hands are soft and perfect. She's not wearing her gloves, for once, and she can feel the slightest tremor in her hands as she pulls her just a little closer.

"I assure you, Marquise, that was far from my intention." He grumbles, clearly not happy with how
this is turning out and Mindfang gives him a pearly white smile full of fangs.

"Well she would have been killed, poor thing. But we made it out in one piece. It took me a bit longer that I would have liked to pick her up so I really do thank you for that, Eadric," Mindfang murmurs and then frowns--

"Aren't you going to offer a lady a drink?" She asks, rolling her eyes. "Rosa, do you mind?"

...Are they seriously going to pretend that absolutely nothing has happened and this is really nothing more than a social call?

Apparently. Because Mindfang continues to give her a meaningful stare until she gets to her feet, still shaking and turns to ask the Orphaner:

"So sorry to disturb you, Sir, but where do you keep your better alcohol?" She asks, as primly as she can, and Dualscar starts to sputter and, oh, oh my is he angry?

No, not angry. He's furious. But he can't do anything to her now that Mindfang's sitting there, smirking like she's worth eight million dollars.

He's staring, slack jawed and more than a little horrified. "Marquise--"

"It's in the cabinet in that corner, Pet," Mindfang says, softly, gesturing behind her haphazardly. Rosa makes herself move, somehow, and before she or Dualscar really know what's happening she's pouring Mindfang a brandy (in the proper glass) and returning to her side.

She hands Mindfang the glass and stands, trembling at her shoulder.

"Will that be all, Mistress," She murmurs and Mindfang nods then pats the couch cushions beside her.

"Come here and warm me up, Pet," she says, when Rosa doesn't move. She crawls onto the couch beside her, her body snapping from the effort of not screaming and she collapses beside her and she begins to cry once more.

Mindfang helps her to sit up, pulling her close and pressing Rosa's face against her neck. She starts to make soft noises of comfort and kindness. Rosa can't do anything but breathe in the scent of her perfume and let it fill her brain with everything wonderful that comes along with the smell of jasmine and body warmth.

"Look at how sweet you are, Pet," Mindfang says, smiling at her but her eyes are tense and anxious as she sweeps her eyes over Rosa from head to toe. "Oh, darling, you need a bit of a bath, don't you? We'll get you in the tub as soon as I'm done with my business here, alright darling?"

She squeezes her hand and then, horrifyingly, pulls her hand close and kisses it. "I don't think I'm going to have you stay with Eadric any more, I missed you far, far too much my darling girl."

Rosa can't respond without sobbing so she climbs into Mindfang's lap and huddles there, hiding from Dualscar as best as she can.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing with her, Vienna?" Dualscar say, clearly exasperated. "Don't keep trying to make me jealous; it's not going to work-- you just look like a fool."

Mindfang rolls her eyes. "Eadric, if you don't have anything nice to say about your houseguest I don't think you should really say anything at all."
"She's useless, even to you Marquise," He snaps, loudly, growling in the depths of his chest. "You don't even tell her where you're going."

"We're going someplace warmer. I was considering heading south to Cagliari, but I hadn't really decided yet. Just someplace warmer, isn't that right Pet?" She says, stroking her head and Dualscar makes a strangled noise.

"Are you kidding me!?" He screams, getting to his feet far too slowly. "ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME!!?!!?"

"I told you so." Rosa mutters, darkly, between sobs. "I told you!"

"YOU'RE GOING ON VACATION!?"

"Yes." She shrugs, petting Rosa once more, her fingers slipping over her filthy hair with a disgusted noise. "I need a bit of a holiday. A little bit of sunshine would do me good and I am my own boss you know--"

"I-- I thought you were going after me--"

"Well that too. But I mean-- Ed? Really?" She rolls her eyes and snorts, passing her glass to Rosa. Rosa finishes off her brandy after only a few minute's hesitation. "I know what you're trying to do. And I don't much feel like getting in your way."

She stands, slowly, Rosa in her arms. She gives her a brusque once over once more and something in the back of her eyes breaks and a wave of utter terror sweeps over her even though she knows it's directed at Dualscar, not herself. She squeezes her shoulder and Rosa lets out a horrible noise.

Mindfang glances down and at the sight of the singed flesh of her shoulder she goes silver white then violent blue in a matter of seconds.

"For now, at least," She says, lightly, turning to give him her worst stare, her voice completely casual as if they're still discussing where they're about to holiday.

"You need to stand up, Pet," Mindfang whispers, softly, and Rosa takes her hand and tries to keep her two feet on the ground. She manages to do so, somehow, and stares Mindfang in the eyes. She gives her a smile that's full of so much relief and pain that Rosa starts to cry again because she came for her and Mindfang helps her walk out of Dualscar's cabin.

They're halfway across the deck when Dualscar composes himself enough to chase after them.

"She bears my brand, Marquise--" He sneers, gesturing at Rosa's exposed arm with his harpoon. In the moonlight his scars gleam almost blue and Rosa decides, once and for all, that it was Mindfang who disfigured him so hideously. If she could walk unsupported, she'd go over there and punch him in his smug face. "--No one will deny she's my property."

"Unlike you, Orphaner," Mindfang snarls, shoving Rosa behind her and drawing a dagger, blade silver and glinting brightly, "I don't need to prove myself by searing my symbol into as much innocent flesh as I can buy.

Dualscar snarls and lunges and Mindfang shoves him back. They're both looking more than a little haggard, Mindfang especially so. Rosa clings to her even though she knows she's in the way, her legs shaking too much to allow her to be less of a nuisance.

"So long as she bears my sign, you have no hope of making her yours," The Orphaner finally snarls,
seeming to his parting blow, because he begins to retreat across the dock. Mindfang seems to accept
this as an adequate response but--

Like hell is she going to allow him to have the last word.

Like hell is this piece of-- oh god what can she say that's offensive enough? She's so mad she can't
think of an adequate insult.

Like hell is she going to let a sea dwelling moron take ownership of her. First of all, that's de-
civilizing to her as a sentient creature on so many levels to think branding her can make her
'property'-- Mindfang might be possessive, but at least she never attempted to mark her like cattle and
second of all if she's going to belong to someone she might as well belong to the one who paid for
her.

Somehow, she manages to find her feet beneath her and stand tall. She slips out from behind
Mindfang, ignoring her snarling "Rosa stop that".

"You mean nothing." She hisses, baring her teeth, and not for the first time in her life someone larger
and stronger and more important than her begins to cower as she looms over him. "You mean
nothing, you overgrown lump of coral and if you think that for a single second I will subject myself
to your--"

Mindfang tries to stop her. She tries to pull the knife from her hand, fingers digging into her wrist but
she won't be dissuaded.

As Dualscar stares, his face torn between a mixture of besmirched fury at being threatened by
someone with such lower standing and horror at her actions, she digs the point of the blade into her
skin.

It's easier to do that she expects. One swipe, vertical, with a flare at the top. Two connected arches,
meeting at the middle. And then one long downward swoop.

She can't tell you what it means. She can't tell you the trolls who have borne this sign before her, or
the trolls who will bear it after her or a single story behind its origin. All she knows is that the 'M' is
the sign worked into Mindfang's clothing and stamped at the beginning of each of her journals and
tattooed just beneath her collarbone. It's Mindfang's symbol, so close to her own and still somehow
so significantly different. And while it's hardly better than the brand beneath it, it's something of her
own.

In the darkness of the night, no one can see what color she's bleeding and, for some reason, Rosa's
incredibly grateful for this because he deserves to know as little as possible about her life and her
motives--

If he doesn't remember her, he isn't going to now.

"Fuck." Mindfang says, her eyes going wide. Dualscar lets out a noise of choked disbelief and she
can hear him trying to muster up a sentence.

"Don't." Is all she says, raising a hand. "I'm hardly in the mood to hear it."

She can't take him. In a fight, he would win in a half of a heartbeat, and they both know it. He's
broken her wrist, her ribs, branded her so many times she'll never forget what her own flesh smells
like as it turns into smoke but she'll be damned if he gets the last word.

"You're doomed to be lost in the flood of everything she's done," Rosa hisses, her words injected
with as much vitriol as she can stomach. "The only thing you've managed to do is steal her slave, and, the Empress must think that such a major accomplishment."

She's struck a nerve with that one. She thought she might.

"So don't you think for a second you matter." Is what she snarls before Mindfang wraps her arms around her waist, throws her over her shoulder and hauls her off across the docks.

* * *

Mindfang moves fast for a woman hauling a good hundred pounds worth of bone and flesh.

"...I'm flattered, Pet," Is all she says as they approach the Widow, bobbing at her berth. "But next time, perhaps, could we save the melodramatics for a more convenient moment?"

"I hate him." Rosa snarls, her voice hazy because suddenly she's remembering how much pain she's in, how hard it is to breathe, how good it feels to be warm in Mindfang's arms. "I hope he dies in a fiery explosion and we hear his dying screams from fathoms away."

"Fathoms are units of depth," Is all Mindfang says after an awkward pause. "And he's taken."

They make it up the onto the ship incredibly quickly. Mindfang moves a little too fast for Rosa to be entirely comfortable, given the state of her ribcage and Mindfang mutters an apology when she realizes where the pained noises are coming from. She doesn't slow down, though.

"Cast off." She barks to Marcus, who's standing at attention. "He's going to be after us soon enough."

"You're not dead," Rosa says and they both stare at her a little nervously as she smiles. "I was worried she would have killed you."

"I know too much to be disposable." Is all Marcus says with a shaky smile before he kisses her forehead and whispers: "I'm so glad you're okay."

“REALLY? IS THIS REALLY THE TIME? For fuck's sake! Can we cast off before someone else gets kidnapped-- or do you expect me to random the whole fucking crew!?" Mindfang snarls, the surge of fury she'd hidden to irritate her kismesis suddenly too much to contain, like bread dough left to rise until it pours over the sides of the pan. Marcus goes off without another word, shouting in his loudest bass tones. Rosa doesn't know what he's saying; her hearing has the audio equivalent of tunnel vision. She pulls at Mindfang's sleeve as she half swoon, still too afraid to entrust herself to unconsciousness. Mindfang glances down at her in momentary confusion before understanding dawns. Doubtless she's the sort of ironclad hero who could get a limb chopped off and just go 'so what? just a flesh wound! just a scratch!' until she'd achieved victory. Rosa has the ability to be like that, she supposes-- but only until her anger spends itself. Feral rages only last so long. Then you just want to drop over and sleep, no matter how ungallant it might be. Mindfang moves to pick her up, remembering just in time that Rosa's injuries might not welcome such rough treatment. She guides Rosa's arm over her shoulders, kicking off her shoes so she doesn't have to stoop. It takes them an eternity to make it to the door of Mindfang's cabin. They somehow manage to maneuver through the door before Rosa gives up and collapses onto the floor. The door closes, Mindfang turning the key in the lock and depositing it into her coat pocket in a single fluid gesture. Rosa stares up at her face, which is eerily reminiscent to a painted figurehead's in that it shares a similar pained but unfeeling expression. She stares at the room itself, which is an absolute disaster that someone hastily tried to put back into order (and failed to). She stares at the familiar things, smells the familiar smells, and-- at long length-- assures herself that she's safe. She's not silly enough to need to convince herself that it's
real, more concerned about possible dangers lurking in the dark. Then she falls to pieces, still piled in
an ungainly heap next to the door. Mindfang drops down in front of her with loud crack that has to
have dented her kneecaps or broken the floorboards. Rosa doesn't take the time to find out what
comfort mechanisms she was about to hastily employ; she grabs her by the neck and pulls her down,
digging her hands into Mindfang's tangled hair and scrabbling to get closer. She presses her head
against Mindfang's neck and sobs in screams until the toxicity of her fear has subsided from nuclear
to arsenic. Only then does Mindfang reach up and gently unlatch Rosa's fingers, wrapping them
around her neck instead. She finds a way to sit with her back against the door without forcing Rosa
to change position, thereby allowing Rosa to climb halfway into her lap. There aren't any comforting
arms twined around her shoulders, but a pair of hands perch, quavering, on her hips, their owner too
scared to touch her but too scared not to. She doesn't try to tell Rosa that it's all okay now. She
doesn't try to say that Rosa's fine. She doesn't even say 'it's all over now'. She just sits there, only the
twitching of her neck muscles under Rosa's hands betraying that she's still present and accounted for.
Rosa doesn't mind the silence, a compassionate way of tacitly acknowledging that there's no comfort
to be offered that wouldn't be insulting. At long length Rosa regains some modicum of emotional
control -- not enough to calm herself, but enough that she can speak. "You came for me," Rosa says,
and her voice cracks up an octave. "You came for me." She repeats, almost in horror at the words
emerging from her mouth. She says them again, anyways, no matter how embarrassing they are.
When you've given up on rescue, there's only so many things that can be said to properly convey
your thanks. Rosa doesn't think 'thank you' will do. But 'you came for me' does the trick. Mindfang
nods, the gesture conveyed by the shifting of her hair on the backs of Rosa's fingers. Then Mindfang
lets out a keen that's absolutely staggering in its pitch, a noise that rings in Rosa's ears like the distress
bell of a foundering vessel. "I was so scared." She breathes, and her voice hitches. She sounds like
she's admitting to the worst possible sin, almost shying away from the words. "I'm so glad you're
alive, that you're--" Mindfang stops short before she can say 'okay', reassuring Rosa that her previous
silence wasn't due to social awkwardness in face of so much overpowering grief. Rosa feels her
begin to tremble with suppressed sobs, irascible at the very thought that this could make her cry.
Rosa knows she should, at this point, come out with the trite reassurances about why it's okay to be
upset. Encouraging Mindfang to get in touch with deep-seated emotions could be an asset. But that
would take too much effort. All of her concern is expended upon herself, leaving only a sliver of her
to be flattered by this display of attachment. It's gratifying after hoping so desperately that Mindfang
would save her: not only has she been saved, but she was also saved out of something more than an
unwillingness to let Dualscar gain a victory. There's blood streaming down her shoulder, her ribs
ache something fierce and her vision is beginning to fade in and out but she'll be damned if she's not
a little bit happy. The ship is out of the harbor by the time they're both over the initial expurgation of
feelings. The movement of the ship is a comfort to both of them, Mindfang falling into the force of
habit and Rosa feeling more sure that no intruder is about to bust down the door. "Can you get up?"
Mindfang asks, disentangling herself and worming her way out from beneath Rosa's mostly
unconscious body. Her mind's still present but her body... is calling it a day. She shakes her head.
"Just carry me," she whispers, groggily, managing to lift her arms. Mindfang lifts her easily and a
little too quickly, Rosa shouting in pain without a trace of guilt. It means that Mindfang place her
onto the bed with reverence, carefully adjusting her so that she's not in obvious discomfort. Rosa
doesn't have the heart to tell her that she's in so much pain that it hardly would matter if she had a
pillow under her head or not. She remains bent over her for a while, rubbing Rosa's cheek and
breathing through her nose. She has been crying-- her eyes are rimmed in a telltale blue, tears on the
lashes, faint signs of swelling. She looks like she might start crying again, this time where Rosa will
be able to see it. It's a heart wrenching moment of vulnerability from a woman who's usually damn
good at taking everything in stride.

"Are you going to be okay?" Mindfang asks, finally giving in to convention out of desperation to
comfort herself. She strokes her thumb over the back of Rosa's hand, still afraid to touch her.
Yes. That's her gut wrenching response. Yes, I'm fine, nothing happened, let us ignore it and get drunk then curl up in front of the fire! But the pain is there, the panic is there, the fear is there-- and she's so tired. She doesn't feel like making anyone feel better until she does. "No." She whispers, and her voice hitches once more. "No, I'm not."

"Well, I intend to fix that." Mindfang says, firmly, her voice untarnished by her grief from a few moments before. Her face doesn't agree with her conviction, but it's a start. "You'll heal."

"You can't fix it." Rosa says, voice cracking. "He branded me--"

"I can try," Mindfang insists and she stoops lower, low enough to press a soft kiss against her lips. It's soft and sweet and utterly pure. There should be a better word for it, but it doesn't end so quickly that it could be a token gesture, it doesn't last long enough to be desperate it's just... so chaste that it's hard to believe Mindfang’s thought about sleeping with her, let alone make several spirited attempts to seduce her. Rosa's lips are cracked and roughened to bleeding, but it's the only thing she's been desperate for (besides freedom, which is a given)-- which is saying something about the pathetic state of her life at the moment. "We're going to fetch the doctor, get you dinner, get you in the bath and then see about finding you a bottle of wine."

"Don't you mean a glass?"

"Fuck that, you just spent a fortnight stuck with my Kismesis. I need to get drunk after two hours with him." Mindfang strokes her hair off her face and it's to her credit that she doesn't shudder away from how disgusting it is.

"I missed you quite a bit." She whispers before pulling away. "And I know you have every right to hate me, but I would rather prefer it if you didn't."

"I don't," She says, after a long pause. "But I must admit I think you have atrocious taste in men."

"That's why I usually stick to women." Mindfang mutters with a laugh. Rosa rolls her eyes to convey amusement of some sort. Snorting would take too much energy. In a show of awareness that betrays she's not as emotionally oblivious as she postures, Mindfang doesn't leave Rosa alone in the room, nor does she allow the passing sailor she wrangles to do her bidding to enter the room. She does shout at him, though, which doesn't seem necessary-- but it probably makes her feel better. Rosa takes the lull to rest her eyes, convinced that she won't sleep. She doesn't but she lets Mindfang think she is; a few moments to herself now might be the only thing that keeps her from becoming more nervous than she already was before this. The Widow's doctor isn't remarkable, looking like any other sailor on board, tanned, short, poorly cut hair with a few scars just for the look of it. Mindfang assures her that, unlike many ship's medicine men, he has training. He beams a little when she says that-- apparently this is some kind of accolade for him. Rosa grudgingly allows him to survey her, wary at having anyone touch her and experiencing her usual bout of doctor-based anxiety. They usually see too much for her comfort, noticing little details that most people don't because they're not performing a detailed evaluation about her physical health. He assures Mindfang that no, Rosa doesn't look like she's dying and that, no, he isn't certain that she's not because internal bleeding is a thing. She supposes that he thinks it's best to tell his Captain up front that there's still risks-- Rosa still thinks it's stupid, but maybe her current bout of rage is preferable to her reaction if Rosa were to, without warning, die. "WELL!? HOW CAN YOU CHECK THAT?" Mindfang shouts, too loudly for the space they're in. Rosa winces. "I. Well. I don't mean to be indelicate--" Rosa has a premonition about what he's going to say next but waits before responding, in the off chance that she's wrong. "--But, um. I'd need her to disrobe so I can see where any bruising might show me where she was beaten, then feel around for any broken bones, test for any sensitivity to touch..." He trails off at the look on Rosa's face, turning to Mindfang for assistance. She's frowning, but waves
away his concern. "I don't care if you see her naked, just make sure she's not dying!" Rosa minds if he sees her naked. Rosa also minds if he touches her. She also minds the knowledge that any examination will be deeply painful. There's an interval before either of them notice that she's not moving to disrobe. The doctor coughs. Mindfang gives him a look that says, without words, 'what the fuck do you expect me to do, I can't do anything, what if I hurt her, what is wrong with you, someone should really shoot you in the foot before you say anything stupid'. It's an impressive litany for a pair of raised eyebrows and a twist of her mouth. "Let me, uh, help you?" He asks, awkwardly laughing to absolve himself of blame in case Mindfang disapproves of the offer. She doesn't. He bends over to help Rosa sit up and, without the slightest pang on her conscience, she kicks him. Not between the legs, because that seems extreme. But rather hard in the stomach, enough so that he stagggers backwards with a squawk. Mindfang glances her as if to verify that this was an accident. She's disappointed by what she finds. "You could have just said no, you know," she mutters, stopping herself before she gets angry and shouts things that are inappropriate to say to someone in Rosa's current state of distress. Mindfang groans and presses her face into her hands. "You have to have someone look at you. You had the shit kicked out of you and fuck knows what else happened." Rosa shrugs. The doctor has recovered fairly quickly, but still rubs his stomach and winces. He smiles at her, though, possibly glad that she's relieved him of a potentially risky duty. "Don't shrug at me! That's not a question! I'm not looking for input!" Rosa shrugs again. Mindfang closes her eyes and takes a deep, slow breath. She doesn't know how long Mindfang's determination not to shout at her is going to hold out-- she gives it a few weeks. Rosa would be somewhat upset if she didn't know full well that it's all reactionary bellowing, yelling at stupid things because she can't do anything with her anger about the things that actually matter. The amusement of watching her valiantly do battle with her instincts is faint and likely unfair. But it's so mundane that it's better than having Mindfang fawn over her: things must not be as bad as she thinks they are if Mindfang's still blustering.

She's settling into the blissful distance of shock, dreamily processing the world in a haze of denial that anything ever happened. It's not a very well-padded state of shock: she's still jumpy, still feels like she was thrown off a building and still wants to weep into Mindfang's dress. But it's enough distance that she doesn't feel obligated to remain hysteric, instead allowing herself the dispensation to be amused. Her past experiences have taught her that the next few days will be a damn nightmare as she gavottes between 'I am completely fine, really, see I'm behaving normally' and screaming.

"Okay! Fine!" She snaps, growling under her breath. "Tell me what I need to look for, won't you?"

The doctor starts to deliver a list of symptoms. Rosa closes her eyes again, opening them when Mindfang shoos him out of the room to collect supplies.

“Sorry,” she mumbles, pathetically, to the doctor. He smiles, faintly, and tells her that ‘it’s quite all right, Ma’am, no problem whatsoever’ and Mindfang grumbles something in the background that sounds like 'yeah because you're making it MY problem'.

The doctor leaves and comes back with enough medical detritus to address any possible complaint. He passes them off to Mindfang who thanks him and asks him to remain nearby. He promises to be up at the bridge if anything turns out to be dire. She abjures him to see about getting them some food and he reminds her that she already sent someone to do that, but he'll see how that's progressing. Mindfang locks the door behind him and turns to give her what is probably meant to be a reassuring smile but she looks even more upset than before. Rosa stares up at her and hopes she's not actually angry. She looks angry, her cheeks losing the tint from her perpetual sunburn as she tightens her jaw to keep from scowling.

"Are you upset because he was a doctor? Or were you upset because he was a man and he was trying to touch you."
Rosa frowns, confused by her wording.

"Eadric-- He didn't... he didn't take advantage of you, did he?" She asks, quietly, and her voice is death itself for him if he had.

"No. No he didn't." Rosa replies, not needing any more clarification as to what she's implying. Her voice shakes as she, naively, realizes the plausibility of that assumption. Her body goes slack with a new surge of fear and she swallows the need to cry when it all threatens to overwhelm her. Crying will just convince Mindfang she's lying, which wouldn't end well for anyone. No, she just didn't want a stranger touching her. Or to deal with a doctor. But she can see where she'd draw that conclusion; Mindfang has to have seen her share of victims over the years at sea, and seems like the type of person to avenge such crimes until someone's paid for them. Mindfang doesn't look at all appeased by Rosa's response, but she doesn't continue the line of questioning. She crosses to the bath and fills a deep basin with warm water. She returns to the bedside, still scrutinizing her as if she expects something fearsome to burst forth from her mouth at any time.

Mindfang sets the basin on the mattress beside her. It's half full, so the chances of a spill are low, even as Mindfang-- clueless to such worries, apparently-- helps her sit up enough that she can be tended to. Rosa savors the faint hint of warmth that emanates from it when Mindfang places it in her lap for safekeeping (maybe not that clueless). The unpleasant process of picking up the aftermath begins at Rosa's shoulder, singed, mangled and covered in blood. Mindfang dips a rag into the water, swishes it out and then wrings it as if it were someone's neck. The water leaves it in a curtain instead of a trickle. When Mindfang presses it to her arm it stings but she doesn't make a sound. It takes a few wipe downs to get rid of the worst of the blood, which has already begun to dry. When the extent of the injury comes into view Mindfang lets out a hiss between her teeth.

"Pet," She says and her voice catches. Before Rosa can try to comfort her she leans in and presses her forehead to her shoulder. Her face is cold against flesh that's still hot from the branding iron. It's an agreeable sensation, temporarily stripping some of the tenderness away. "Pet, you didn't have to--" She starts to say, her words mumbled into her skin. "Rosa, you really-- you shouldn't have--"

"I'd rather live with a reminder of you that I gave myself than a reminder of him that I never wanted," Rosa says and her voice cracks into hysterics once more as she remembers the evocative smell of white hot iron on her skin. Mindfang lets out a sound that's a cross between 'I'm touched' and 'I am so sorry' and 'I'm going to kill him'.

She shakes her head and Rosa can feel something damp that might as well be tears. "But I don't want you to have that either, Rosa," She whispers, nuzzling close. "I don't want you to--"

"You don't want me?"

"No, my darling." She says with a snort, lifting up her head enough to roll her eyes. The divisiveness is ruined by her seeking out one of Rosa's hands and squeezing it until her fingers ache. "No, that's not what I said. I meant that I don't want you to... I don't know. Lose your identity, I guess."

"I don't understand." Rosa says, simply, and Mindfang drops her hand with a frustrated huff. She trails her fingers over the symbol carved into her skin, still bleeding and lets out a sigh that seems to emanate from her very soul. That sounds silly as she thinks it. Wherever the sigh is coming from, Mindfang sounds absolutely dejected.

"You're mine." She says, softly, pulling her knife from her abandoned coat and extending it. "But I only want you for you. If I wanted you to bear my symbol, my Pet, I would have put it on your damn collar. Carving it into you is... too undignified."
"Are you ashamed--" Rosa begins, taking some offense at the fact that Mindfang doesn't consider her worth lifetime affiliation. Not saying that they'll be... with each other for a life time. But just that Rosa being scarred with her symbol would always be a dead give away that they HAD been.

"We're not making this about me for once." Mindfang says with a growl, showing her fangs. "We're making this about you, turtledove--"

"No, I'm stopping you at turtledove that sounds silly."

"Fine then, Pet," Mindfang grumbles with unneeded emphasis, rolling her eyes and taking a deep breath. "I like you better when you're refusing to be my property."

The knife suddenly hangs between them like a choice.

"Please, Rosa," She murmurs, looking older and more exhausted than Rosa has ever seen her. "Please. Don't destroy yourself for my sake."

Her fingers curl around the hilt of the knife, still shaky but strong with a weapon in them, and for the second time that night presses a blade into her skin. This is far harder than carving Mindfang's symbol, even though it requires far fewer cuts. She doesn't fear the pain-- everything hurts-- but there's something so final about irrefutable evidence of her identity. Her symbol is her symbol. Anyone who's seen her wanted posters would comment on it, she's sure. But she does it anyways. A single curve of the blade is all it takes, turning the tail of the 'm' into a loop. It's not elegant looking, by any means, but it's good enough.

Rosa comforts herself with the knowledge that she doesn't scar in the same way normal trolls do; admitting this out loud, however, would make the entire exchange much less meaningful-- so she leaves it unsaid.

"Thank you. Now-- Let's get you cleaned up, shall we?" Mindfang says, exhausted but trying to sound cheery. She wipes away the new wellspring of blood, holding the cloth there long enough to let the bleeding slow to a trickle. When she drops the cloth back into the water a cloud of jade swirls up. They both watch it. Rosa wonders if Mindfang feels as nauseated at the sight of it as she does.

Mindfang binds her shoulder as gently as she can, after carefully applying something to the burn that takes away some of the throb. When Rosa hisses at the sensation of the unguent against her cuts Mindfang caresses her jaw and gives Rosa what is probably meant to be a reassuring smile.

"Better, love?" She breathes and Rosa's glad she can nod, not trusting herself to keep pain out of her voice any longer. The first act of healing is the end of her tolerance, apparently. Mindfang kisses her again. Rosa's slightly taken aback by how blithely affectionate Mindfang is being, but it calms her nerves somewhat to feel her close. She assumes the same holds true for her Mistress. There's something undeniably real about being so close to someone: she can smell Mindfang's sweat, the slightly mildewed smell of her coat which was probably left in a pile on the floor instead of being properly dried-- not to mention the undercurrent of her perfume, a cherished, familiar comfort. Rosa knows she herself smells like rotting flesh, fear and other unpleasantness. But terrible smells are even more real than nice ones, aren't they?

"Good girl." She says, absently. "Now, let's take a look at the rest of the damage, shall we? Get that dress off?"

Rosa nods again. She's realized just how exhausted she is and just how good it feels to know she's safe. All she wants is to get out of her filthy dress and go to sleep, but she's even too tired to do that.

When she doesn't move to undress herself, Mindfang sighs and stands, slowly, picking up the bowl of bloodstained water and trying to set it onto a bedside table that isn't there. She looks bewildered, realizes her mistake and scowls. In a fit of pique she drops it into the bathtub and hauls one of the
end tables over from the fire. As Rosa's eyes drift shut she refills the basin and throws a few more
logs onto the fire, sparks shooting out towards her shins. Someone knocks at the door; Mindfang
unlocks it, scolds whoever was unfortunate enough to be sent with food, then repeats the slamming
and locking process. Dinner is set onto her desk, the china rattling only slightly when she remembers-
- in the nick of time-- to control her frustration.

"If you're waiting for privacy, you'll be here for a while-- I'm not leaving you." Mindfang grumbles,
crawling under her desk and emerging with a bottle of spirits. She gives Rosa a pointed stare before
yanking the cork out with her teeth and filling one of the glasses most of the way to the rim, then
swallowing half of it. The rest is carried over to the bed and placed beside the clean water. "Well?
What? Can't you do it yourself--" Rosa hopes she's raising an eyebrow sardonically like she wants to
be. Rosa shakes her head for good measure and tries to find the energy to make a suitably sarcastic
reply.

"Oh. Oh, okay," Mindfang replies, her voice hitching a little. Rosa's shocked to hear her sounding
nervous and whines. "Um-- I guess-- I guess I can do that then."

"Please, Mistress," She murmurs, trying not to cry-- or laugh, she can't tell. She hopes this is due to
consideration for Rosa's modesty rather than a reticence to see her nude. She hasn't had the latter in
the past, so there's no reason to start now. "I don't mind."

Mindfang gives her a tight smile, her cheeks turning a darker shade of blue. Rosa closes her eyes
again and feels vaguely grateful for exhaustion, since it's sapping away some of the fear she thought
would never go away. She keeps her eyes shut as Mindfang makes a few false starts at removing her
clothing. She handles her like she's a blown-glass bauble for a St. Perigee's Eve tree that will shatter
if you so much as sneeze in its general direction. It was a nice dress to begin with, although now it
needs to be burned, and while she's lost a few buttons on the back, there's still enough there that it
can't be guided away without moving her. Mindfang tries to reach behind her, but can't seem to
maneuver. There's a halfhearted hand on the hem of her skirt, which rapidly vanishes when she
realizes that there's no way to get it up over her head. Eventually the frustration gets too much and
Mindfang hisses. "Fuck it." Is all Rosa hears before she feels Mindfang's fingers curling under the
neckline of her dress and tugging it forward. Rosa opens an eye and shrieks in fear as Mindfang
plunges a knife towards her and cuts her bodice open. "Oh. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry! Don't cry!" She
begs, groaning. But she doesn't stop cutting her dress off. Rosa's initial burst of panic subsides into
annoyance, relenting only when Mindfang is able to pull the mangled dress off of her shoulders like
a robe. Rosa's only required to sit up for a few seconds but the pain makes her curse. Mindfang
keeps her upright long enough to unfasten her breast band, intelligent enough to realize that cutting
that off will only result in Rosa getting stabbed. The only thing she manages with any trace of
elegance is pulling Rosa's underwear off, which is executed in a maneuver that immediately betrays
it as well-practiced. Rosa, grateful to be slumped against the pillows, can't bring herself to care.
When she's herself again she's horrified that Mindfang was so close to her when she was nude. But
present-moment Rosa is just glad not to be wearing filthy clothes. She knows Mindfang's staring at
her but she just doesn't give a flying fuck. When the silence lags, however, she opens her eyes to
frown.

Mindfang has taken a few steps back and is staring, her lips going colorless and her face draining of
any trace of blue. She looks like she's been shaken down to her core, clearly not expecting the wealth
of brutality that's covered Rosa in marks that resemble grass stains. She wonders if Mindfang is
horrified to realize that someone she loves is capable of such violence and decides that, yes, she
probably is. Poor thing. Rosa would like to comfort her but a voice in the back of her skull is
perfectly happy to have her pity. She doesn't play it up-- because how do you 'play up' the physical
extent of your injuries-- but she also doesn't try to put on a brave face. Partially because that would
require moving her face.
"Rosa--" She says, her voice keening. "Rosa, my darling girl--"

"At least this way I'll look even better the next time around?" She tries, with an awkward laugh, finding that she can't bear the full brunt of Mindfang's sympathy. Mindfang doesn't respond in kind.

Without a word she creeps closer to begin her examination, carefully avoiding Rosa's eyes. It's disconcerting but she can't be bothered to worry. She answers questions when Mindfang poses them, indicating that her wrist has been mangled (not as bad as she was afraid of), she was kicked in the stomach and ribs a bit, she was shoved around a bit by the other slaves in the hold-- the litany is longer than Rosa anticipated. She's surprised she was able to put up with so much without giving up sooner. Mindfang must have some amount of first aid experience as she manages to retreat to some sort of emotional distance, not recoiling when her actions make Rosa flinch or cry out. Her first task is to clear away most of the grime, accompanied by a few apologies when it gets invasive enough for her to tense up and cause herself pain. The only thing that will get her actually clean is a long succession of baths and a good scrub down, but it's a good enough start. Mindfang replaces the water before she starts to clean the festering marks from her fetters, Rosa hissing her way through the procedure like a snake and outright wailing when Mindfang soaks the rag in 'medicinal' alcohol and repeats the procedure. At least it isn't painful to have them wrapped in gauze. It IS painful when Mindfang starts prodding at her wrist, ignoring Rosa's curses and attempts to yank it away-- she can still bend her fingers which is apparently a good sign and while she can't move it without sobbing in pain, there's enough motion to show that it's damage she can recover from. Mindfang ties a splint with efficiency, absentmindedly wondering if there's any ice to be had. Rosa hopes so. She hopes there's enough to fill the bathtub with it. If there isn't, she'll just try to climb into the cold storage in the galley.

Her ribcage is, by far, the worst part of the procedure. Mindfang tries to be gentle, but there's only so much that can be done. When Rosa shows no signs of obvious internal trauma beyond 'probably broke a few ribs holy shit I am so, so, so, (etc) sorry', Mindfang binds them up. She does so with so much tenderness that Rosa starts to cry, overwhelmed anew at how damn glad she is that Mindfang actually came for her. During the entire examination she takes extra care not to touch her anywhere it's not strictly necessary. Rosa appreciates that, she supposes, but a few clandestine caresses wouldn't have been unwelcome. She'd like to remember what it feels to be touched in a way that makes her shiver rather than shudder. But she does feel cared for, which is a start.

"I smell terrible," she mutters, groggily, after Mindfang asks her if there's anything else, "And I am very cold. And naked." She gets up without a word and crosses to her dressing table, returning with the delicate crystal bottle of her perfume and her robe. Mindfang applies it to her skin in awkward movements, clearly more used to doing so on herself. Rosa inhales with a noise of pleasure. It smells nicer on Mindfang, of course, but it's better than the smell of the metal warship still sending sour notes up her nostrils. Helping Rosa into the robe is more awkward than the perfume was-- eventually Rosa just insists on standing, braced against Mindfang so that she doesn't have to exert herself. The robe hangs on her even more than usual, which just means there's more to wrap her up in-- Mindfang offers to find one of the ones they purchased for her that's actually in her size, but Rosa collapses back onto the bed before she's forced to surrender a beloved garment. Mindfang settles her beneath the blankets this time, propping Rosa up with all the pillows. After some searching a suitable scarf is found and fashioned into a sling, reminding her not to use her hand.

"There," Mindfang mutters, observing her handiwork with a pleased smile. "Already better."

"...Not really." Rosa whispers. Mindfang's eyes snap to hers, guiltily. Rosa can see that she's struggling to find a way to offer some small comfort. Before she can say a word, Mindfang's kneeling at the bedside with tears running down her cheeks.
"I'll kill him," She says, fiercely, and Rosa feels her anger in a surge. "I'll destroy him if you want me to."

Rosa sighs, touched, and buries her good hand into Mindfang's hair. "No. That won't fix anything at all."

"But--"

"It won't make it go away." She breathes, softly, hating herself for taking the high road, even after what he's done to her. Maybe it's not the high road, precisely, since she'd kill him herself if she gets the opportunity, but the slightly elevated road that makes her want to put Mindfang's feelings before her own. How long as she been with this man? How long have they been a couple? She might still begrudge Mindfang for turning her mind against her to make him jealous, she might not think he's good enough for her in any capacity, but Mindfang doesn't have a lot of people. If Dualscar's dead, the closest she has to an intimate relationship is Rosa herself, and she knows she isn't capable of supporting that. "You can't fix things by destroying them."

"But--"

"I just want to sleep, Mistress. Please." She begs, her voice going hoarse once more as tears rise to her eyes. She starts to cry again and Mindfang immediately goes to hush her, kissing her repeatedly and apologizing, again and again. True to prognostication the insulation of shock has abated now that she's been poked, prodded and made to feel miserable. The feeling of disquiet only increases the longer that she sobs, a gradual escalation that eventually results in her coughing so hard that she begins sobbing in pain. Mindfang quiets her by placing the half-empty glass of what turns out to be gin against her lips and pouring it back, forcing her to swallow. She manages to suppress the choking motions that usually appear when she consumes something this strong. "You're overwrought." Mindfang diagnosis, correctly but with such old fashioned language Rosa stares, bemused. Mindfang opens the door to her cabin and leans out, as if to leave, and Rosa immediately starts to sob once more. She turns back, panicked, and reassures her: "I'm just going to ask the doctor to come in and ask a question. I'm not leaving"

The doctor appears in a few moments and Mindfang holds a hushed conversation with him and Rosa's too tired to care but she still hears the word 'sedative' and flinches, reflexively. She does her best not to hear the rest of it and turns to cuddle close to the wall. It hurts to move but she still holds to the vain hope that she'll get comfortable if she tries hard enough. She doesn't like being sedated: it's worse than being locked up, because then you're in control of her own mind even if you can only lie there. It also brings back unpleasant memories of Mindfang spiking her drink. and, for the moment, she only wants to have good feelings towards her.

The doctor steps into the room and gives Rosa another anxious smile. He carries his bag over to the coffee table, sifting through it and telling Mindfang that he doesn't label the bottles so that the crew can't steal drugs. Mindfang listens to him in unencouraging silence. When Mindfang finally comes to sit next to her, she isn't carrying a glass of dosed up wine this time. She has a glass of water and several pills. She fixes her with a stare that would broker no argument.

"Sedative and a painkillers." She supplies, quietly, in her 'you are going to obey me because there is no other alternative' voice. "And I would like this to be painless, please."

Rosa doesn't want to, but she takes the pills all the same, slightly shaken by the fact that Mindfang watches her intently to make sure she swallows each one. Was she a nurse in another life? She could have been. The doctor leaves after a few minutes have gone by and he isn't spoken to. Again-- door is shut, then locked. T
Mindfang brings her food, next, and stares at her expressionlessly as she eats, refusing to budge until all of it's gone. It's only bread and cheese, nothing remarkably, but It feels good to have a full stomach again. She could probably eat even more but given that she hasn't really eaten anything for two weeks now that probably wouldn't end well.

"Good girl," She mutters, absently, when Rosa's eaten and been properly drugged. She turns off all the lanterns save the one on her desk. "Go to sleep."

"...No." She breathes, afraid to say the syllable but doing so regardless. "No, I want you."

It's a hefty demand for a slave to be making, but she feels rather as if she's entitled to it. Mindfang gives her a pleading stare and Rosa starts to cry again and then, before she knows it, Mindfang is scrambling under the blankets beside her.

"No, no, darling, stop, darling--" Mindfang coaxes, haphazardly, nuzzling her neck, kissing her, struggling to calm her even as she calms herself.

Mindfang curls against her like a cat, leaving no chance for her to slip away unnoticed once more. Rosa's left facing the wall and the windows that overlook the moon-black surf below. Mindfang draws the curtains, for once, and they're left in a cozy little alcove of luxurious fabrics and expensive bedding-- a gorgeous little cove of ridiculous, unneeded beauty on board a pirate ship.

They're twined together, almost as one, beneath the silk sheets and the ridiculously cozy duvet. Mindfang's body is a chilly presence at her back but she can bear that. Her pillow smells like lavender and her Mistress smells like all the wonderful things she can remember. Her wounds have been seen to, she's eaten, she's warm--

There isn't a comfort in the world she's lacking. But she can't sleep. She can't even feel tired. All she can feel is pain and fear and desperation despite whatever Mindfang has slipped her. There isn't any room left for the rest of it, the better feelings--

She wants to feel relief at her Mistress's renewed company. She wants to-- well-- be happy. But all she can do is cry, silently, shaking violently.

Mindfang doesn't say a word. But Rosa knows she's awake. Her breath isn't steady against the nape of her neck and every time she lets out a particularly violent sob she curls a little closer, arms wending just a bit closer to her waist, careful to avoid her ribs, and her leg wraps around her even more.

"Don't cry," She whispers, sniffing pitifully. "Please don't cry."

Rosa doesn't bother attempting to find the words to explain. But she nuzzles into the hand clasped to her bosom.

Mindfang the one who sighs after a half hour of their tag-team crying and half-assed comforting has passed and sits up slowly.

"Pet," Mindfang murmurs, pulling Rosa into her lap. Rosa curls against her, grateful she can hide her face. Mindfang shifts, uncomfortably, and Rosa hears her yawn. "What's wrong?"

She shakes her head. Mindfang lets out a wince of pain as Rosa's horns graze her abdomen but she doesn't push her away. If anything, she pulls her closer.

"Please say something," She begs, voice hitching and Rosa feels her fingers tighten around the hair at the nape of her neck. "You're scaring me."
"I thought you'd let me go." Rosa finally whispers, and she digs her fingertips into Mindfang’s thighs. She's not wearing anything more than her silly white nightgown, lacy and silken and absolutely useless at keeping out the cold, and Rosa can feel the chill of her blood pooling beneath her skin.

"I thought you'd let him take me and you weren't going to ask for me back."

"No. No, my darling, I never would--"

"That's just it. You didn't. You didn't do that."

"...Rosa?" Mindfang murmurs, and her voice curls up awkwardly.

"No one ever came back for me, not ever." Rosa whispers and she can barely finish her sentence. "And I don't know how I should feel about that."

"You should hate me for not coming sooner. You didn't deserve all that." Mindfang begins to stroke her hair, her hands moving like her head is suddenly made from blown glass. "I tried, really I did--"

"I know you did." She shifts a little closer. Mindfang tugs the duvet up over her shoulders until her neck is entirely covered. "And I was so scared. I was so scared--"

"Shh, shh, Pet," She murmurs in what Rosa assumes is meant to be a calming tone. "I know."

"Thank you--"

"Don't thank me." Mindfang snaps and Rosa all but lurches out of her lap, all but flying to the floor. She's pulled back by a pair of strong arms that pull her close to Mindfang's chest. Her face is pressed against her pristine silver-gray neck and all she can smell is jasmine.

"Sorry." She says after an awkward pause. "I'm a foul tempered bitch."

"I know."

"Thanks."

"It's not going to do you any good if I deny it." Rosa mumbles and Mindfang laughs but it's not really a proper laugh because it turns into her crying again. Mindfang hugs her tightly and sighs.

"You'll feel better if you sleep," she tries to reason, and it's true but she can't sleep, she's too afraid to do that. "I won't go anywhere. We're on a ship. I'm not going to jump overboard and swim back to shore or anything."

"...I don't want to sleep." She breathes, curling in close.

"Well, I want you to."

"Clearly, asserting your authority is the only thing missing in this situation to put me at ease. I feel so much more capable of sleeping now."

"...Do you want me to make you?" She murmurs, softly, her fingers carding through her hair like it's freshly shorn wool. "I can put you to sleep for as long as you like. No dreams. No nothing."

"I don't want that." Rosa says, pathetically.

"I think I really should let me," She murmurs, softly, letting out a heavy sigh. "I really, really, really..."
"I don't want you to--" Rosa hisses, showing her fangs. Her lashing out makes Mindfang startle back but she doesn't react, she doesn't do anything rude--

"You're going to sleep." Mindfang says, gently, easing her back onto the bed despite Rosa thrashing. "And you're going to like it just fine, my little one--"

"Don't you dare do this to me again," She hisses, loudly. "Don't you dare break your promise to me again."

Mindfang falls silent. Rosa falls silent too.

"...Only just to calm you down?" She tries again, softly. "Just for ten minutes."

"No," Rosa snarls.

"Can I get you more drugs?"

"NO. I just-- I just want you here with me." She hiccups, wiping at their eyes. "Can't you understand that?"

"...I'm not much use, you know that, don't you?" Mindfang mumbles, sadly. "I can't make it better for you, no matter how much I try--"

"Yes, you can," Rosa insists, near to tears again and oh god she's pathetic. "Just hold me."

Mindfang makes a sound of discomfort and shies away but Rosa hiccups out a few sobs and she moves close once more.

"...Can I tell you a story, at least?" Mindfang whispers and at that Rosa nods without question. She sits up next to Rosa and starts to whispers the familiar strains of a children's story but it's a brilliant retelling that still holds Rosa's attention so that's okay--

And then she drifts off to sleep with Mindfang's voice echoing in her ears, Mindfang's arms around her, holding her close and keeping her safe and warm. She squeezes her hands, tightly, and holds them and lets herself pretend that-- somehow-- everything's okay.

It isn't, of course, but the illusion is enough for now and she lets herself pretend that Mindfang won't hurt her anymore.
or, I totally forgot you were a pirate.

Chapter Summary

Rosa recovers, slowly, and Mindfang frets over her. Sickness doesn't always bring out everyone's best side, and Rosa isn't any different and she raises some rather valid points. A little bit of excitement begins as Mindafang's crew insists they attempt to take an oncoming ship.

Please be advised that this chapter contains discussion of suicide as well as self-harm.

Chapter Notes

Wow look at me I'm on a roll. This chapter would have kept going but we'd have ended up with like a 70 page chapter and you'd all murder me. Anyways, I hope you like this chapter <3 you're all such wonderful human beings I can't really fathom it. Thank you so much.

We've also got some lovely fan art done by the wonderful littlewingmod, who was also the illustrator a few chapters back for the Intermission! It's going to be appearing in the scene described but here's a link for you all:
http://littlewingmod.tumblr.com/post/52006612246/some-art-i-did-for-the-lovely-sablesheep-for-her
Pretty things <3 thank you so much!

Also a reminder that I totally love taking requests and if there's anything you'd like to see me write, feel free to drop me a line and I'll do my best <3

Rosa doesn't wake up for two and a half days. Mindfang tries to wake her several times, shaking her softly and trying to convince her to eat but she ignores her and rolls back over every time she tries. She sleeps without dreaming and a worn-out conscience tries to tell her that it's probably Mindfang's doing, but, well with her increasingly frantic attempts to wake her that seems like less and less of a possibility.

She when she finally awakes, it's early in the morning. When she tries to sit up her body won't listen. Everything hurts and she has no idea what in the world is wrong with herself until she glances down and sees the motting of bruises covering her entire body. Her skin looks like the palette of a painter who's discovered the joys of monochrome, deciding to cover a silvery canvas in swipes of every shade of green imaginable.

Her throat is dry and when she tries to call out, she has no voice to ask for water. Rosa can see a pitcher on a table that's been moved close to the bedside but it's on the side of her body that's been abused the worst, with her fractured wrist being the one that would be able to reach.

The blankets are, thankfully, wrapped around her, and to her bemusement, the shawl that Mindfang bought her is wrapped around her shoulders and, curiously enough, there's a small stuffed bird
tucked in beside her.

Her initial fear that it's actually a taxidermy animal is appeased upon closer examination; it's made from satin that's been dyed iridescent shades and has what appears to be tiny little crystals for eyes. It's a darling little stuffed parrot and Rosa finds it incredibly quixotic but still somehow comforting. She has no idea who in the world would have a stuffed toy on a pirate ship but it's clear that the gesture is born of sympathy and it makes her heart melt a little more.

She shifts as best as she can, considering her mangled body, and gets as comfortable as possible. The bed curtains have been tied back and, bizarrely enough, Mindfang's desk has been moved.

It doesn't take Rosa too much effort to realize that her Mistress has moved her desk so she can observe her while working and the thought makes her begin to bawl without warning.

The tears are still coming with a panicked urgency when the door opens.

"Mistress?" She sniffs, trying to blot the tears off her face. But, no, it's not Mindfang, it's Marcus. He blinks at her, looking mildly concerned, and finally says:

"No. Marcus."

"Hello Marcus." Rosa manages to say with a fleeting smile, biting back a fresh wave of tears because she wants Mindfang. "It's good to see you."

Marcus steps into the room, his posture military precise. Rosa watches him, nervously, despite the fact that she knows she can trust him. He sees her nervousness, apparently, because he stops before he gets any closer.

"Can I get you anything?" He asks, voice gently and steady. "Or would you prefer I call the captain?"

"I--I--" She swallows and her eyes dart across the room before her self-disgust rises in her stomach and her courage is piqued. "I'm rather thirsty," Rosa admits, but Marcus doesn't make a move.

"May I?" He asks, just as quietly, gesturing to the pitcher beside her and Rosa nods. He moves far more slowly this time, with gestures that are deliberate and careful. He keeps a measured distances from her as he fills the waiting glass and only when she nods does he help her raise the glass to her lips and drink.

She downs half of the glass before Marcus pulls it from her lips and tells her she's going to make herself sick.

"I'm so happy you're safe," He says, softly, placing the glass back onto the table. Rosa snuffles once more but smiles and this time, without hesitating, takes her good hand a squeezes it, tightly. "We were all so worried for you, Miss Rosa."

"That's very kind of you to say, Marcus." She murmurs and he squeezes her hand once more. He smiles, a genuine smile that crinkles up the corners of his eyes. In the cozy light of Mindfang's cabin his hair looks even more surreal, starkly colorless against the rich blue velvets and dark woods.

"You missed a bit of fun while you were detained." He murmurs as he helps her to drink once more. This time he allows her to finish the glass.

"Did I?" Rosa asks, idly. She tries to sit up a little more but ends up letting out a pitiful whine as the movement makes her feel as if she's had a knife forced into her lungs.
Marcus immediately rushes to her side, shushing her. He helps her to get more comfortable, propping her up a little more and rearranging her blankets.

"I would offer you something for the pain but I'm afraid the Captain keeps all the drugs locked up."

Rosa laughs. The action makes her ribs seize up once more and this time the pain makes her gag and then groan once more as she's overcome by pain. Marcus makes a concerned sound and presses his hand to her forehead and talks her through the worst of the spasm.

"Perhaps we should wait to chat until you're a little less convalescent." He asks, softly, and Rosa nods, giving him a tiny, regretful smile. "I was supposed to get the Captain the moment you awoke, you know."

"I recommend lying to her. And if that doesn't convince her, I shall cry." Rosa tells him, as reassuringly as possible. Marcus almost laughs, catches himself before he can set her off and then-- to her surprise-- leans in and kisses her cheek.

"Feel better soon, Miss Rosa," He says, bowing before he walks out of the room. The door has barely had time to close behind him before Mindfang is rushing through the door. She's almost leapt onto the bed before she seems to realize how terrible of an idea that would be.

"...You're awake," Mindfang says with a bit of a wheeze. Her hat is in her hands and she fidgets, anxiously, with its brim.

"Your hat, Mistress," She manages to say and each breath feels like she's being kicked once more. Mindfang races to her side, fretting anxiously. Rosa knows she can't do anything to help but Mindfang still places her hands on either side of her face and tries to talk her through it.

She's slightly better at it than Marcus is, which isn't surprising, and a funny tingling in the base of her skull tells her that Mindfang may be up to no good, but this time she can't at all bring herself to rebuke her Mistress for it.

"We couldn't wake you, Pet," Mindfang murmurs, and she sits on the bed beside her without asking and that, for some reason, takes some of the tension from the room. "You were quite determined to sleep, darling."

She gestures to the side of her face where there's a lurid blue bruise. "I tried to make you get out of bed and you got rather nasty."

Rosa can't help herself. She grins, showing her teeth and, thankfully, Mindfang grins back.

"You're the one who said I had a bit more spirit than you bargained for," Rosa reminds her, then immediately begins to cough. The anguished keens and choked breaths make Mindfang fret over her once more.

"Shall I get you something for the pain?" She asks when Rosa collapses against her pillows once more, already feeling completely exhausted from her half hour awake. Rosa nods.

Mindfang slips out of her viewpoint for a few minutes, and when she returns she has their tea tray and an apothecary bottle that's labeled with familiar, spidery writing.

She holds out the pills for Rosa to slip into her mouth. Rosa attempts to give her a look that says 'I can't move what are you doing?' but Mindfang's so anxious she doesn't notice a thing. She swallows her pride and bends her head, swallowing them directly off of her palm.
"...Never do that again." Mindfang says, quietly, and Rosa glances up to see that she's utterly horrified. She wants to feel ashamed of herself but everything hurts, the pain emanating from the very centers of her bones.

Mindfang pours her another glass of water. This time she presses it to her lips and there's no need to do anything more than nod when she's had enough to drink.

"You must be starving, Pet," Mindfang says, absently, frowning a little when Rosa only inclines her head instead of nodding.

Sleep is calling her once more and it seems like the perfect place to be, a pillowy abyss of dreams and the ability to forget the pain.

"...Please don't go back to sleep. You're scaring me." Mindfang begs, her voice cracking. Rosa feels her knit her fingers around her good hand and the brush of her skin makes her open her eyes once more.

She blinks up at Mindfang. "...Dinner?" Rosa repeats, slightly hazily. "Dinner and blankets?"

"Are you cold?"

"Only a little, Mistress." Rosa mutters, trying to find a way to subtly imply she wants Mindfang back in bed beside her. "I'm sure I'll be fine--"

Mindfang is already giving her a dismissive wave and bustling about the room. She finds another blanket from somewhere and drapes it over her, and then more pillows are produced and soon enough she has a cozy little nest in Mindfang's bed.

"Better?" Mindfang asks, anxiously and Rosa gives her a smile. She wants to laugh, but she knows how much that will hurt so she just smiles at Mindfang as indulgently as she can. "Good."

She settles back on the bed beside her, this time with the tea tray in her lap and soon enough, Rosa has food and it's all so awfully reminiscent of the evening they first met that it makes Rosa bizarrely nostalgic.

When she's satisfied that Rosa has eaten enough, Mindfang pours her a cup of tea. She curls Rosa's fingers around the cup and helps her to hold it steady as she drinks.

"You look like shit," Mindfang mutters, suddenly, and lets out a pitying sound. "You poor woman. Look at how brave you are, how strong."

Rosa soaks up the praise like a flower in the sun. She sounds a little condescending but when she takes Rosa's hand, her fingers are cold and trembling.

"You're go strong," Mindfang repeats, raising her hand to her lips and kissing her knuckles, which are just as cut up as the rest of her body. But the contact is exhilarating and Rosa feels herself relax at the feel of Mindfang's touch. "I'm so proud of you."

"Thank you." Rosa simply says, doing her best to squeeze Mindfang's hand back. Her hand doesn't obey as well as she'd like but Mindfang seems to get the pictures because, without preamble, she leans in and captures her lips.

It's a delicate kiss, almost like a gossamer brush of a spider web over the back of her hand. But she's suddenly surrounded by the smell of Mindfang's perfume, her shampoo, her soap, the uniqueness perfection and warmth of everything she is.
"This is where you belong." She whispers and Rosa wishes she could wrap her arms around her. "Back home with me."

"Yes, Mistress," she says, struggling not to cry. She doesn't succeed. But when she starts crying, Mindfang doesn't panic like she expects. She stays where she is, forehead pressed to her forehead, fingers in fingers. She smiles at Rosa and uses the hem of the sheets to wipe her eyes.

She doesn't cry long, or hard, because it hurts far too much to do that. Mindfang soothes her with soft whispers and soon enough they're both silent once more.

"I'm going to go--"

"Stay," Rosa begs, eyes going wide and childlike. Mindfang freezes immediately. "Stay with me, please."

"Rosa-- I mean-- I don't know what--" she's verbally fidgeting, unable to settle on a response. Rosa watches her struggle to decide what to say but relaxes the moment Mindfang's shoulder's slump.

"Will you read to me?" She asks, softly, and Mindfang's face begins to brighten until she looks almost celestial.

"Can I? Do you really--?" Mindfang asks and Rosa nods, smiling at her fondly. Before she knows it Mindfang is scrambling off the bed and is rifling through her shelves. Rosa hasn't had the chance to place them in chronological order like she wanted to, but it would appear Mindfang knows exactly what she wants and where it is.

The journals look identical to Rosa's eyes, exactly the same as the rest of them. Same black leather embossed with the sapphire blue 'M', same cream colored paper that's as soft as satin under your fingers, the same gilded page edges and the same length of blue ribbon used as a bookmark. But Mindfang knows them from the moment her fingers touch their spines, as if they're all little pieces of her soul.

Rosa watches the way her expression shifts, almost perceptibly, the moment she holds them in her hands, as if she's greeting a long lost friend she's been waiting decades to see once more. It's an expression that's youthful and endearing and utterly unspoiled by anything the world has thrown at her.

Mindfang turns to face her with a pair of journals in her hands. "Do you want an adventure or a history?"

"...For the love of--" Rosa laughs, pressing her fingers to her temples. "Do you really classify them?"

"Some of them are my research and some of them are my chronicles--" Mindfang murmurs, looking a little flustered by Rosa's reaction. "I didn't want to--"

"No one's read to me in years." Rosa cuts her off before she can gain much steam, giving her a wide smile. "And you have one of the most charismatic voices I've ever had the pleasure to hear. I would consider it an undue honor."

"Flattering flatterer." She purrs, with a warm smirk. "You're a little too manipulative to be believed sometimes."

Rosa smiles back at her and, with supreme effort, she reaches over with her good hand to brush her fingers over the back of Mindfang's hand. "I don't lie."
"I know. I don't condone liars, darling. Would never have let you aboard if you were." She runs another doting hand through Rosa's hair, giving her a scrutinizing look. Rosa tries to give her a confident, warm smile but isn't sure how effective the look is given the fact that her face is probably just as bruised as the rest of her. "So where do I begin?"

"The beginning is the traditional choice, Mistress."

"You are being cheeky today, aren't you?"

"Those who ask silly questions will generally receive answers that they do not find entirely satisfactory." Rosa closes her eyes and settles in, nestling her chin against her shoulder and allowing the insistent tug of the painkillers to draw her into drowsiness.

"Ugh, not what I meant, darling." She kisses Rosa's forehead. Rosa makes a noise of deep contentment and Mindfang purrs, a little, delighted. "Now shhh, let your Mistress take good care of you, hmmmmmmmm?"

She grins, excitedly, and before Rosa knows it Mindfang is sitting on the bed beside her. Rosa can tell from the tension in her body language that she wants to cuddle in close, rest her head in Rosa's lap and have Rosa stroke her hair while she reads. But Mindfang does an admirable job of keeping from touching her; she remains a half-foot away. The only part of her body that comes close to touching her is her knees, which are tucked up beside her that softly brush against Rosa's thighs.

Rosa lets Mindfang fuss over her for a little while, glad for the warmth and attention that's being showered on her. When Mindfang is adequately assured she's comfortable, she settles in herself and begins to read.

Rosa is happy to acquiesce. Mindfang cracks open her journal and begins reading in a beautiful tenebre voice. She's chosen a good adventure to read, one that happened so long ago and so far away it doesn't remind Rosa of anything hurtful. Judging from the things she mentions, the events are taking place almost four decades ago which, to Rosa, is a blessing. It's a story about one of her independent escapades, a journey into an inland swamp rumored to be haunted by one of the Royal Navy's lost ships. The story itself is full of startlingly beautiful metaphors and wonderfully deep reflections on the nature of life as well as assuredly exaggerated feats of strength. She pauses every once in a while to check on her, stroking hair out of her eyes or pouring her more water.

It's amazing how good it feels to sit there and do nothing at all; Rosa can hardly believe it. Normally she'd go half-insane from being obligated to sit here and do nothing more than listen; there'd be a hundred and seven different things racing through her brain, chores to be done, things to worry after-but, no. Not now. Half-dead and half-conscious, with Mindfang against her side, she knows she can't do anything more than listen so she does.

The sound of a book closing and falling to the ground is what wakes Rosa from her trance-like state of aural enjoyment. Mindfang runs a hand through Rosa's hair, brushing her fingers over the base of her horn. "Enjoying yourself, love?" She asks, softly, and Rosa nods.

"You are incredibly enthralling, Mistress, even in paper form." Rosa murmurs, wishing she could snuggle close against her. She wants nothing more in the world than to curl up against her and allow herself to be cosseted for hours and hours.

"What did we say about the flattering, darling?" She teases. Rosa laughs-- it hurts so she stops-- and Mindfang immediately looks worried once more.
"Can't I have the doctor take a look at you?" She asks, quietly, and Rosa's whimpering at the thought before anything concrete has even been suggested, afraid of so much as the notion of him coming to look at her. "Come along, Pet, he's hardly going to hurt you, I'll be right there--"

"No." Rosa snaps, with a vehemence that surprises her. "No I don't want to."

"Why are you afraid of him?"

She doesn't have an answer to that. Because he's a man? Probably. But Marcus doesn't bother her in the slightest so she doesn't know how well that theory would hold up.

"I won't make you." Mindfang tells her, huffing a little. "I just don't understand--"

"Don't make me," Rosa begs, her voice getting frantic and soaring several octaves. "Don't make me, please don't make me--"

The pain in her ribs increases with her panic. She can't breathe, and even if she wanted to it wasn't going to happen because it hurts, it hurts--

"For the love of-- Damnit Rosa--" Mindfang wraps her arms around her. It hurts to feel her arms digging into the bruises, but it helps a little to feel her close and Rosa forces herself to calm down. It's a pitiful attempt, but she tries all the same.

"...Do you need me to read to you more?" Mindfang asks her, desperately. "I can read to you more! Just calm."

Rosa nods. And it's decided, they read more, Mindfang going through the entirety of the journal at her side and then one more before Rosa falls asleep once more.

* * *

The next week passes in much the same way; eventually Rosa can sit up a little more and read to herself and pour her own tea, even hold her own cup with her good hand. She does not leave her bed, except for when Mindfang finally gets up enough confidence in Rosa's health to shoo her into the bath.

Marcus visits her every day; he sits at the edge of the bed and keeps her company. He does a better job than Mindfang does, oddly; where Mindfang frets, he quietly takes care of her. He's also a good bit better at coaxing her into seeing the doctor.

Crying does not work anywhere near as well on Marcus as it does on Mindfang, that's mostly what does it. When she breaks down, he allows her to panic until she calms down on her own-- and then he picks the point right back up.

When Marcus's shift is called up and Mindfang returns, she walks in with the doctor in tow. Rosa trembles the entire time he examines her, flinching away every time he touches her.

He's patient and gentle and takes his time. There isn't a single part of the examination that should frighten her at all but she's still petrified. Mindfang remains at her side the entire time, whispering quiet phrases of comfort as his fingers press into her broken ribs and she lets out quiet scream of pain.

The ship's doctor confirms what Mindfang and she both expect. Two of her ribs are broken, her wrist is fractured and a good deal of her body is bruised, horribly. He checks for internal damage and seems satisfied that none of her organs have been harmed, but he warns her she can't take anything for granted and that, for now, it's best to stay in bed.
Rosa finds it odd he's addressing her so frankly when he must know she's the Captain's slave but doesn't comment because she knows, either way, Mindfang will tend to her.

"Let me take one last look at you," The Doctor says, jovially, and Rosa doesn't appreciate it, but she is glad he's trying, at the least.

He frowns as he looks her over, carefully having her twist her hands out so that he can examine the insides of her forearms. Rosa pretends not to notice that they're covered in lines of angry jade.

"What happened here?" He asks, frowning. "I've never seen anything like this before in an interrogation situation. Almost looks like claw marks--"

Rosa tenses. She tenses and pulls her arms out of his grasp, folding them defensively around herself. "Nothing happened. It's nothing." She answers, ignoring his bewildered stare.

"Well. I suppose it wouldn't be the first time someone forgot what happened to them in a situation like this; don't you worry yourself about remembering. Captain, if you could see to it that everything's properly tended to?" He gives Mindfang a long stare that apparently means something. Rosa pretends not to notice that, too.

"I'm working on it," Mindfang mutters, sighing. "It's under my control."

He smiles at her, tersely and then, to Rosa's surprise, he takes her hand and holds it between his own.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" He asks her, softly. "Anything at all?"

She looks, instinctively, at Mindfang, who looks absolutely horrified. "Don't look at me!" She grumbles, immediately shying away and Rosa lets out a pained noise.

"Answer him, Rosa," Mindfang murmurs, softly, resting her fingers on her shoulder.

"...I don't know." She says, softly, eyes going wide as she attempts to answer his question. "I-- I just want to get better."

"Good to hear, Ma'am." He squeezes her hand and it jars her a little to realize he looks relieved. "It's good to have you back. The Captain is far more tolerable with you around."

Mindfang makes an outraged noise and he laughs, giving her a smile. Rosa's a little startled to realize, once more, that Mindfang and her crew are close, not just physically but emotionally. They're a little world unto themselves and Rosa can't help but think of them as a family.

"Besides, I always worry when one of my crew gets banged up." He says, shrugging. "Captain, see to it that she stays in bed. Don't put any pressure on those ribs, make sure her breathing sounds good. And don't you dare try any funny business with my patient, d'you hear me?"

Mindfang hisses a little, but she shakes his hand before pulling him into a tight hug and muttering her thanks. He leaves the room after briskly saluting her.

When Mindfang turns back to her, she's still in shock. He knows her name, first of all, and she survived, secondly. But he thinks of her as part of the crew? He thinks of her as one of his patients, one of the flock under his wing?

"Are you alright?" Mindfang asks, anxiously, catching sight of her shocked face almost immediately. "Rosa, Pet, you look like you've seen a ghost--"
"Am I part of your crew?"

"Of course you are, darling."

"...I didn't know that." She says, a little childishly, as Mindfang drapes her blue dressing gown over her shoulders, in an attempt to hide her nudity. "No one told me."

"Oh, yes, I'm so tremendously sorry-- I meant to tell you, you're a living being, you have a free will and your life kind of sucks. Welcome aboard the Widow where pretty much everyone is wanted by the Empire or ended up here because I found them in a slave market and thought, 'hey you sound interesting!' Let me go get your employee handbook, your pamphlet to being a pirate and your gift bag."

"...There's no need to be rude," She mumbles. "And you don't need to make fun of me."

"I'm not. What? You think I'm lying about half this ship being convicts and the other half being ex-slaves?"

She shrugs. Mindfang rolls her eyes and settles her back into her bed.

"If I didn't think you'd take the first opportunity to kill yourself, I'd set you free just as happily."

Mindfang mutters, helping her to sit up. She doesn't look at Rosa in a way that's anywhere near inappropriate, even though she's well aware how naked she is. "Honestly. You need to stop--"

"What's the weather like?" Rosa asks, quickly. Mindfang gives her a tight-lipped glare and narrows her eyes. "I mean. I haven't been outside in a few days since the man you're sleeping with spent two weeks torturing me."

Her voice goes affectionately warm and sweet, as if she's telling Mindfang how sweet and kind she is for doing something for her. She gives her a wide, cheerful smile that doesn't reach her eyes. It's a low blow, she knows that but, to hell with being nice.

Mindfang stares at her, clearly shocked. She takes an anxious step or two back, her fingers curling around her coat. It's clear she doesn't know how to protest that, not at all-- and Rosa's glad she's won.

"...It's nice. Bit overcast. Still chilly but we're getting more south and it won't be long until we're warm again." She says, slowly, frowning a little. "Rosa--"

"Don't make me talk about it." She hisses, angrily. "Or I swear I will make you regret it."

"Rosa--" Mindfang breaks off, rubbing at her face, her thumbs massaging the dark circles under her eyes. "Fine. Fine, anything to make you happy."

It's an odd phrase, incredibly odd. At least it's odd to hear it from her Mistress, the woman who owns her and can do whatever she wishes to her without any consequence whatsoever--

"My apologies, Mistress." She says, forcing herself to sound calm and obsequious--

"Damnit, Rosa, I'm trying-- I'm trying to help you--" She tries to say, hiccupping a little. It's an odd sound to hear but, well, she sounds as if she's crying and that only serves to make Rosa even angrier. "Please, can we just-- just-- pretend I never brought it up?"

"Yes." Rosa says, her voice going high and twisted. "Yes please."

Mindfang gives her a big smile that doesn't at all reach her eyes. Rosa can see she's getting close to
her breaking point and it's admirable to see her struggling. Admirable isn't the right word, maybe. Perhaps she means flattering? Flattering to see how hard Mindfang is struggling to keep her happy.

Rosa allows herself to be dressed in one of the nightshirts Mindfang had purchased for her during their shopping expedition; it's sewn from an dark green satin and has brass buttons running in a neat row down the front and Mindfang has no trouble slipping it up over her shoulders.

It's far more shameful, this time, to allow herself to be coddled like an invalid, and it doesn't take more than Mindfang reaching for the shining buttons before she stiffens and makes an irritated sound.

"I can do it." She mutters, glaring at Mindfang until her hands retreat. The look in her face is becoming more and more strained but she composes himself.

Mindfang acquiesces to her and moves away, slightly, folding her hands before her. She stands ramrod-straight at attention and watches, impassively, as Rosa attempts to fasten the buttons of her shirt.

Only when does she begin to vocalize the pain she's in from the exertion on her injured wrist does Mindfang react.

"Stop." She commands, her voice leaving no room to argue. Rosa's hands fall to her sides automatically and, in moments, Mindfang is deftly fastening the buttons for her.

"Don't be stubborn unless you can get something out of it." Mindfang snaps, a little more harshly than Rosa thinks is strictly necessary. She flinches and Mindfang, for the first time in days, doesn't immediately begin to panic.

"I don't know what else I can do for you, Rosa," Mindfang tells her, softly, as she adjusts the collar of her shirt and smooths her hair away from her face in a gesture that seems almost habitual. "I really don't. But I'll do whatever you need me to so long as you tell me what's wrong."

"I want to go back to sleep now." She says, as pitifully as she can.

"Rosa--" Mindfang begins, exasperated. "Rosa, you can't keep doing this to me. Please, darling. Please--"

She sounds heartbreakingly concerned and the urge to tell her not to worry is incredibly strong. But Rosa manages to ignore it and crawl back under the covers like Mindfang hadn't said a word.

It doesn't take too long for Rosa to get comfortable enough to fake sleep and, after a few minutes, Mindfang appears to give up on attempting to get her attention. She hear footsteps lead away and then, nothing more.

She opens an eye to verify this and-- no-- Mindfang's still standing there, a book in her hands. She's reading while she stands vigil and Rosa wants to punch her.

"Go away," She insists, pulling her blankets up over her head. "I don't want to see you!"

"Too bad. I'm not going anywhere."

* * *

She's not lying, not at all. Mindfang remains there for hours, leaving her side only to pick up another book when she finishes up the first.
Rosa takes this opportunity to pull the bed curtains shut. It's hard and it hurts to sit up so quickly, but she does it anyways.

Mindfang does not like this. She doesn't say as much but she pulls back the curtains and ties them back. Rosa snarls at her, Mindfang stares back impassively--

And, of course, she wins. She gets to remain where she's standing, reading her book, and Rosa gets to pretend she's sleeping-- it's ridiculous and stupid and all those moronic things children do when they're trying to be the more 'grown-up' one but don't know how, so they settle for not throwing a temper tantrum.

Eventually, however, she does actually fall asleep. It confirms her suspicions that Mindfang has been creeping in her head, because for the first time since her return, she has a nightmare.

Nightmare isn't a good enough term for it. It's as if she's slipped beyond the waking world and has gained consciousness in the furthest temple of the darkest gods, and they've decided to have her relieve her worst moments as a way to pay for being the only one of her little family to be selfish enough to survive.

This time, she's trapped in the cabin she knows, logically, she's asleep in. Mindfang is there but doesn't seem to know she's in the room; she's curled up in her bed, staring at the wall. Rosa's terrified of something, she doesn't know what, and she tries to wake her but she won't stir. Rosa desperately shakes her, trying to tell her that something's wrong, something bad is going to happen--

Then the room goes dark, so dark that she can't see a thing despite the fact that she knows her eyes can adjust to any light, even if there's nothing more than a crack beneath the door. Her panic goes from an aching feeling in her gut to something utterly paralyzing and she screams, screams and screams as the door opens and then, without warning the room catches fire.

She tries, desperately to put it out because she knows if she can't they're all going to die, not just Mindfang, not just her but everyone else on board and it'll all be her fault again, all her fault and--

It all feels so real that she can't even begin to tell that she's woken up. Even though she's staring at the ceiling and the pattern of stars painted there by someone's skilled hand, even though she can feel the pain all over her body-- she can't shake the feeling that this is still a dream, something is wrong, something's going to break down-- they're all going to die--

The idea is only reinforced when she realizes that no one is standing vigil beside her. No one's in the room-- it's the first time in days that she's been left alone and it leaves her with a sense of surreality, that she's never been anywhere near another being, that the past few years of her life have been a waking hallucination, that none of it ever happened. But when she glances down she sees her wrists, still rubbed raw from being manacled beneath the decks of the Orphaner's ship, and her branded shoulder throbs in sympathy.

Rosa stumbles out of bed and immediately collapses, tangled so tightly in her sheets she can't begin to stand. She falls on her wrists but manages to ignore the pain, somehow, even though her body spasms and she has to sink her teeth into her own hand to keep from crying out--

And then she forces herself to stand, on legs that are unwilling to hold her weight but do so upon being commanded. The trek to the door takes far too long, as if she's on a journey of a thousand miles, but she manages it somehow.

The door opens readily beneath her hands and she stumbles out onto the deck. It's still cold, just like Mindfang told her. Not nearly as bitterly freezing as it was the last time she was conscious enough to
note the temperature, but still cold enough that she should be wearing a woolen dress and a coat
instead of a silk nightshirt.

Above her is a sky that's a deep blue gray and full of clouds that are pearl white; beneath her is a
familiar wooden deck and-- well-- she can't begin to say what's all around her. Fear has taken hold of
her and keeps her so distracted she can't begin to process anything at all. It's as if she has someone
clinging to her back, whispering into her ear, giggling maniacal threats into the air.

She feels almost like she's being smothered and can't escape it. Even as she stumbles across the deck,
taking anguished lungfuls of fresh sea air, she only feels as if the world is closing tighter and tighter
around her.

"Damnit, Rosa," She hears a voice growling in her ear, but she can't focus at all. When a pair of
arms rest on her shoulders she tries to fight back but her trembling is so intense that she can't do
anything at all.

She collapses to the ground, still hoping somehow to escape when she hears a sharp intake of breath
and then she's being hauled to her feet by arms slipping beneath her own and she's dragged
backwards towards the cabin like a drowned creature being saved from the surf.

Rosa doesn't want to go back inside but she doesn't have a choice. She's lifted back onto the bed in a
way that tells her that, yes, there's someone else there because they don't lift her by her stomach but
by her shoulders and feet.

"You're fine, you're fine," Mindfang's voice soothes but Rosa still tries to bite her when her hands go
to smooth across her forehead. "You're fine, my love, you're fine--"

She feel Marcus's hands, strong and steady, curl around her healthy fingers and squeeze softly.
"Captain, perhaps I should fetch the doctor?"

"No, no, she's fine--" Mindfang says and Rosa feels something flicker in her brain and an incredibly
skilled presence finds the tangled web of reality and nightmares and unweaves them, like a spider
caught in reverse, undoing her hard morning of spinning.

The world comes into focus almost immediately. If any of them is horrified by Mindfang's decidedly
unethical behavior, no one mentions it. Not even Rosa has the heart to berate her, even though she
knows letting her get away with it now is just setting her up to fall down a slippery slope.

"You left her alone?" Marcus snarls and Rosa wants to ask him to calm down but she's suddenly far
too exhausted to be of use. It's the first time she's heard Marcus raise his voice, which she realizes is
more than a little odd, considering his position as First Mate. "What in the hell would possesses you
to do that!"

"She told me to leave--"

"Rosa told you to leave, so you left? The fuck is wrong with you--"

Mindfang gives him a pained look but he doesn't relent. Even when she crawls onto the bed beside
Rosa, kissing her over and over again and soothing her, with words this time, he keeps up his
grumbling.

"Marcus," Rosa whispers, her voice barely audible even to herself. Still, he stops mid-sentence to
look at her and wait, patiently, for her to continue. "I wanted her to go."

"...What in the world--"
"Don't yell, please, don't yell," she begs and Mindfang immediately turns to snarl at him with such vehemence that he takes several steps back and hunches down.

She doesn't tell her to back off. He looks furious about it but he backs off until Mindfang's snarling dies off to a slow hiss and then, as he gets within two steps of the door, a final menacing growl.

"Well. I suppose I understand." He grumbles, narrowing his eyes. "But for the love of all things holy, Vienna--"

"Do you think I'd let anything happen to her?" Mindfang grumbles.

Marcus looks at her with a critical eye. He doesn't smile as he throws open the door and huffs out a dark mutter of, "Apparently, yes," before slamming the door.

"This is what happens when I listen to you," Mindfang whispers into her ear. "You silly little siren. He won't speak to me for ages, now. He likes you better, I think."

"If you're going to tell me this is my fault, I'll--"

"It's not your fault, darling." Mindfang rushes to assure her, giving her an anxious look. "How in the world would this be your fault?"

"I don't know--"

"What is your fault is your utter inability to let yourself be tended to, Pet." Mindfang whispers and, finally, curls around her. It's the first time that Mindfang has gotten close enough to really touch her in days, using herself as a pillow instead of the stack of goose feathers and satin that have been bolstering her up for says.

"Can't you just make it all go away?" Rosa whispers, her voice strained. "Please."

Mindfang sighs, behind her, and curls her arm around her hips. It's an awkward position and Rosa would really prefer to have an arm around her waist. But her other arm slips around her shoulders, loosely, and Rosa gets a lungful of her perfume of her wrist.

"No, Pet, I really can't." She murmurs, kissing her all along her cheeks and forehead, skilfully avoiding blinding herself on Rosa's horns. "The only way I can keep anything bad from happening to you ever again is to ensure that nothing can happen to you ever again."

"If you're talking about locking me up somewhere--"

"No, love, not even that could keep you safe." Mindfang mumbles, softly, against her neck. "The only thing that can keep bad things from happening is not being alive at all. And that's hardly fun."

Rosa doesn't respond.

"Do you really want me to kill you?" Mindfang asks her, gently, threading her fingers through Rosa's. "Do you really think that nothing is better than the feel of wind on your face or the smell of salt in the air? Is it better than waking up to a sunrise or crawling into bed beside someone warm and happy to see you?"

"...Would you really kill me if I asked you to?"

"Don't be stupid." Mindfang grumbles, rolling her eyes and kissing her again. "You silly little thing. I adore you."
"Then why would you--"

"In an attempt to make you see reason which clearly didn't work; in the future I will stick to giving you one option and expecting you to blindly obey."

"Yes dear." Rosa says before she can stop herself. It comes across as if Mindfang's complaining about the fact that someone folded the napkins wrong and Rosa's simply attempting to placate her so she can go back to her business.

They both pause before Mindfang starts laughing, hard. Rosa grins and, if she wasn't anywhere near as exhausted or still recovering, she'd laugh just as hard.

Mindfang kisses her, soundly, craning her neck at the worst angle so that Rosa isn't put to any effort. She still turns just a little so that Mindfang can meet her lips.

"We need to get you some lip balm," Mindfang mumbles against her lips, without breaking the kiss. Rosa giggles at that and, for once, doesn't wince. "I'm serious, you're chapping my lips," she insists as she keeps kissing her, slipping her fingers over the patch of irritated skin where her collar should sit.

"Stop trying to distract me from being sad with cosmetics. You know my weaknesses and you're not allowed to shamelessly exploit them."

"That's what it means to be in love." Mindfang mutters, huffing loudly as she apparently decides conversation isn't fun anymore and kisses her even more passionately, pressing her face closer and closer until their foreheads bump, their noses brush like feathers against one another and Rosa smiles.

And then she realizes exactly what Mindfang just said and-- well-- isn't entirely sure what the hell she's supposed to be doing in response to that because, well...

_Fuck._

How much worse is this day going to get?

* * *

It would seem that Mindfang is not expecting a response from saying... what she said. Not that she said anything. Well she said something but not that it was anything remarkable--

Oh dear. Rosa sips her tea, anxiously, staring out across the room. It's been three days. She's allowed to move around a bit more, now. Mindfang, true to her seemingly sarcastic word, is all but looming over her shoulder every second of every day. She's keeping her under careful watch; if it's not her, it's one of her men-- usually Marcus or one of the other sailors who she's willing to talk to.

Today it's one of the sailors, however, and he doesn't quite know what to do or why he's here. Rosa's nest has been transferred to the couch, which has been dragged just close enough to the fire to keep her cozy. She's swaddled in Mindfang's spare comforter with pillows at her back, and there's a trio of end tables just within hand's grasp.

There's her watcher pitcher, her teapot, her tea leaves, a few books, her yarn, more food that she could possibly eat in the scant hour or so Mindfang will be gone and unable to wait on her, and there's blankets piled beside her waiting to be draped over her shoulders.

The yarn and needles are sitting, untouched, on the table. She doesn't want to make another attempt at knitting; her wrist is getting better but she can't quite move with the alacrity and uninterrupted flow
that she needs in order to knit lace. All she's managed to create with her unwieldy needles and plush yarn is a shapeless mass of blue that made her cry, jaggedly, for an hour.

It's the most inconsolable she'd been since boarding the ship-- even worse than the day she returned from Dualscar's. She's glad Marcus is the one who finds her because given Mindfang's anxiety as of late, she wouldn't have put it past her Mistress to attempt to ban all string, yarn, twine and any long pieces of fabric from the ship. How that would affect her ability to sail, Rosa isn't sure but-- well-- she can be unreasonable.

She can't explain it to Marcus exactly why it upsets her so much that she can't knit properly. He reminds her that her wrist is broken and she says, 'I know, I know!' and she does know that the moment she recovers the process will recover but--

Rosa misses that feeling; the feeling of sitting down on her little pine bed with its worn out mattress with the screams of dying children echoing her ears and then picking up her newest shawl and, in moments, losing herself. She misses the river like feeling of knitting, the way that after ten minutes spent with yarn and needles her body is moving like forming stitches is the same as breathing, wool rushing beneath her fingertips like the current of the river.

And then, before she was even aware of it, the bell would ring to summon them all to their next shifts and she'd have half of a lace stole in her lap and, for once, she'd feel as if she had talent, meaning-- the ability to do something wonderful. Taking that tiny piece of string and using sticks to turn it into a piece of fabric that's so exquisite she can't believe it's the work of Alternian hands instead of the skill of a spider.

There was a connection to that little bit of thread that made her feel like she was a part of something, a part of the greater word, a part of something that mattered. As if she had the ability to take her fate in her hands and change her life, if she so wished. And even if she didn't wish, the opportunity was there.

But now she's sitting in a room more beautiful than anything she'd ever imagined calling 'hers', with wallpaper and paneling and an imported carpet. She's wearing nothing but the finest silk, she has a beautiful woman fawning over her every time she so much as sneezes. And yet when she holds the string in her hands, it's as lifeless as her son--

Her teacup falls from her hands. It shatters on the floor in a tinkling of expensive porcelain mourning its own death. The sailor sitting across from her in one of Mindfang's armchairs drops the book on astronavigation he's reading and immediately stands at attention.

"Oh, I'm ever so sorry--" Rosa breathes and tries to stand but he makes a noise of such fear that Rosa knows he's been told it's worth more than his life to allow her to move and so she takes pity on him and simply says: "The broom is in that cupboard, my dear, if you'd be so kind--?"

He sweeps it up. Rosa pretends she can't see him doing it; she doesn't want to watch him doing her job. When he's finished, stands slowly, frowning. She's reasonably sure he's about to ask why in the hell he's cleaning up after his Captain's slave but, instead, he's holding a ball of yarn in his hands.

"I think you dropped this, ma'am," He murmurs, anxiously raising his hand to salute upon addressing her. In his outstretched hand is a ball of yarn spun from wool as deep of a blue as the night sky just after sunset. It's been shot through with beautiful green threads that gleam in the firelight.

She takes it from his hand with a beleaguered sound. It's softer than a cloud, even before it's met her needles and been turned into something so light and frothy it shouldn't be fabric and, without meaning to, she rubs it against her cheek and lets out a delighted purr.
He pretends she didn't do that and sits back down with an askance stare. Hmph. Peon, she wants to grumble at him. You don't understand how lovely a good sheep is when it's been shaved, brushed and taken to a spindle.

It falls to her lap, slowly, and she rolls it around the cushion with a noise that she hopes doesn't sound too awkwardly delighted. Heaven knows that allowing Mindfang to think that she's in competition with yarn for her affection won't end well.

But she does love her yarn. Does she love her yarn more than her Mistress? She can't quite say. She doesn't want to say, really. She doesn't even want to think about it. All she wants to think about are the beautiful things she could do with this little ball.

"Do you think, perhaps, you wouldn't quite mind fetching me a few sheets of paper? And a bit of pencil, of course."

He doesn't seem to know if this is an acceptable request or not. But Rosa smiles at him so sweetly that he seems utterly paralyzed and, after a long, awkward pause, she adds:

"If you'd like to ask the Captain, I won't be at all offended. And I am left handed, dear, so I won't be doing myself and undue harm."

To her immense gratitude, he seems to decide that it's harmless enough to take a sheet of Mindfang's stationary off of her desk and he somehow manages to find a pencil that doesn't look at all as if would be capable of stabbing, even when driven into an artery with indigo-blooded force.

She draws as best she can, given the fact she has no hard surface to write upon, and it's an incredibly rough sketch that she knows only her eyes can see the beauty in. But it's a shawl, all the same.

When Mindfang returns, she leans over the arm of the couch and nuzzles her neck.

"Was she good?" She asks her sailor, as if Rosa isn't capable of hearing her.

The sailor, clearly glad to know Rosa isn't his problem anymore, nods eagerly. "Fine. Just fine. No problems. May I--?"

Mindfang waves, dismissively and he practically runs from the room.

"Were you good?" Mindfang breathes into her ear with a sultry lilt to her voice that makes Rosa want to squirm. She suppresses the urge and manages to remain perfectly still, pretending that she's not at all interested in pursuing that line of thought.

She shrugs and Mindfang huffs, clearly put out. But she sheds her coat and hat all the same, sinking to her knees at Rosa's side. She cradles her chin in the crook of Rosa's elbow. Her eyes flash critically on the paper in her hands and she hears a faint noise of disgruntlement.

"Did you steal my paper?" Mindfang grumbles, turning her teeth onto Rosa's wrist in a reprimanding nip.

Rosa slaps her away, gently and she makes an outraged noise, throwing herself across the carpet like Rosa shot her, hard.

"What are you up to you sly little minx?" Mindfang says, lifting her head just enough to give her a flirtatious smirk. "Are you trying to scheme against me?"

She glances up from her half-hearted sketch attempts to give Mindfang the most wicked smile she
can muster. "Of course I am, dear. These past several weeks have been nothing more than me pretending I'm an emaciated slave girl; now that I have a sheet of paper all of my plans can be quite readily achieved."

"Emaciated slave girl," Mindfang repeats with a huff. "You're making it sound like I'm keeping you in shackles below decks."

"No, my dear, that would be your Kismesis." Rosa says with a voice that could be poisoned. Mindfang's languid demeanor vanishes like water poured over hot coals, or, as the case may be, a white hot brand.

"...Are you going to bring that up every time I try to say--"

Rosa glances up at her and, upon seeing the fear and desperation scrawled over her face just like the lines on the sheet of white paper before her, she relents. "Probably. But I'm sure you'll make it up to me."

Mindfang seems to accept this as a good enough response and pulls herself up off the floor. She crawls over on her hands and knees and Rosa has the barest thought of 'oh, my I could get used to seeing that' before Mindfang is stretching up like a cobra to kiss her. But instead of the brush of lips on lips that she expected, Mindfang simply rests her cheek against Rosa's, eyes closed and face perfectly absolved of worry or pain for the space of a scant few seconds.

Absently, Rosa reaches up to stroke the hair off her cheek. Mindfang's skin twitches beneath her cheek and she makes a happy little sound of utter contentment.

"I'm glad you're feeling better. I missed you." Is all she says before her eyes flicker open and she gets to her feet. "Now, are we going to invite Marcus for dinner or am I going to get the pleasure of your company for a private supper?"

"...I don't know." Rosa murmurs, sitting up a little so she can admire the line of Mindfang's back as she bends over to add a few more logs to the fire.

Yes, she is feeling better. Nervous breakdowns over yarn, panic attacks regarding the state of her relationship with the Queen of the Seas and all-- she's better.

Better enough that, for the first time in several days, she begins to think about just how utterly appealing it might be to have Mindfang taking her clothes off. Somehow the prospect of her removing every stitch of fabric from her body it a whole hell of a lot more entertaining since it's not in the context of a medical exam.

"Will you make yourself pretty for me?" She asks and Mindfang jolts, hard and freezes where she is, still bent over the fire. She turns, slowly, and gives Rosa a stare that's adorably bewildered.

"...Are you hitting on me?" She asks, her voice nervous.

"I have absolutely no idea what in the world you could be referring to, Mistress." She says with a sniff, returning to her drawing. "I just meant that you really could use a bath."

"No you didn't." Mindfang grumbles, rolling her eyes. But she's blushing like she's a troll-blueberry hybrid all the same. "Stop looking at my ass, I'm a woman not an object."

She kicks her blankets off slowly, and swings her feet onto the ground. Mindfang straightens, slowly, her body moving as if she's aware of the way every muscle works and is using it to her advantage.
Damn that woman shouldn't be allowed to wear skintight pants; it's hardly conductive to higher thinking. Rosa blinks at her, slowly, trying to remember what she was saying.

Can she even wear anything under those? Even more relevant, how in the hell did she get into them-- and how is she going to get it? She looks as if someone melted her and then poured her in--

"Please don't argue feminist theory with the woman you've enslaved." Rosa whispers as Mindfang saunters over and bends over her. Rosa's ensconced in a curtain of shining black curls but all she can look at is Mindfang's breasts with, beneath her button down sailor's shirt, are far, far too uncovered.

How in the hell can she wear leather and linen like that? Is she allowed to do that? Rosa's not sure. Her throat has gone incredibly dry and Mindfang gives her a sly stare down and leans in to kiss her.

She stops short of her lips, though, and makes Rosa wait in horrible trepidation. The urge to be the one to cave, this time, is horribly strong. Her breath is there, nudging insistently against her lips, her chilly warmth is there, her smell is there--

"Hey. Hey. I didn't enslave you, the Empire enslaved you, I was just the one to free you from your overlords."

Rosa pretends she didn't hear that. "I didn't hear that, dear, care to repeat yourself?"

"I said, kiss me woman."

She does.

* * *

She's officially been a passenger on the good ship 8lack Widow for Three and a half months when she's left alone again. Three and a half months since Marcus purchased her on Mindfang's behalf, that is. Two months spent sailing, two weeks spent in the Orphaner's 'care' and another month spent convalescing. She's nowhere near recovered by then, of course, but her bruises has faded to green splotches, she can take deep breaths, laugh and walk without her ribcage staging a mutiny and her wrist has progressed to the point that Mindfang will allow her to take off the sling and perform simple tasks, such as-- well--

Not wear the sling.

It's not much, but it's a victory all the same. Four weeks ago she was encroaching on death and now, the only death that threatens to spring upon her unaware is the death in her own mental archives. It's an improvement, to say the least, when she finally slips out of their cabin and joins Mindfang at the bridge one morning, head nestled into her shoulder while she stands at the wheel.

Four weeks of recovery also heralds Mindfang crawling back into bed beside her instead of camping out on the floor or on the couch. It's nice and Rosa tells her as much by falling asleep on top of her arm which pinions her quite effectively. She wasn't quite happy about that but she's gotten rather easier to persuade lately and while Rosa's sure her malleability will decrease exponentially with her own physical improvement, she's not hesitating to take advantage of it.

She awakes one morning to the bed curtains shut tight; she can't see even so much as a crack of light. The bed has been rather recently abandoned; when she sleepily seeks out her Mistress she finds the warmth left behind by her slumbering body. The fact that there's any warmth to find is an indicator that she's only just disappeared; her body's barely above room temperature to begin with and at rest her temperature only drops lower.
There's a whole slew of voices just outside and that's what yanks her the rest of the way to consciousness. They're all preternaturally hushed, but the tone each individual is using might as well be screaming how tense they are.

"We can't just allow them to escape," one of the sailors is snarling and Rosa instinctively hides her face. "We've been trying to catch the Serpent for almost a decade now, Cap'n and we're only gettin' this chance 'cos of the typhoons we missed and if you try to tell me that that little slip of a thing is worth risking your crew--"

"Rosa's very special." Marcus affirms, softly, and Rosa hears the rest of the room take a sharp breath. She makes herself sit up, despite how unappealing it is. She sits up, slowly, and smooths her hands over her hair. Thankfully she's wearing the green the nightshirt and it's matching pants this morning, instead of her usual uniform of just the shirt.

"I'm, I'm jus' sayin', Cap'n, with all due respect, we need this. The crew's pretty put out after what we had to go through to get the girl back for you, don't make them sacrifice the biggest haul in months just so that someone can babysit--"

It's becoming increasingly clear that this is pirate business and she is incredibly excited by it. Oh what fun, an actual adventure! She'll get some new stories out of this, she's sure of it--

"And we won't hesitate to instate someone new if you won't live up to the standards we agreed to when we signed onto the Widow."

The same sailor intones, darkly. "And rest assured, Cap'n if we miss this chance just for some little toy of yours to get her way..."

He stops short of threatening her. Rosa would like to tell him how wise this is because, well, threatening her is never a clever plan.

She slips out from behind the curtains and they quiet once more. Several of them swear. Mindfang, half dressed, is sitting at her desk looking torn between fury and panic--

"I'd hate to be accused of causing problems," She says, as elegantly as she can. "Why don’t you boys go have fun with your Captain? I'm sure I won't be at all put out."

"Rosa--" Mindfang starts to say but she cuts her off with a glare. She raises a single eyebrow and Mindfang shifts, awkwardly in her chair.

"I think I can handle being alone in your bedroom for a few hours." She murmurs, crossing her legs and sitting up as elegantly as she can. "I'm sure nothing will happen."

"Rosa, you have no idea what in the hell you're talking about," Mindfang growls, her eyes narrowing to slits. "This is a raid--"

"Yes, where a group of you go over to another ship and take it over, correct?"

"...If we lock her in here I doubt anything will happen." Marcus begins, his voice slow and calm. "No one will have a chance to board the Widow and even if they do, no one will risk their necks to break into a cabin."

Rosa gestures at him emphatically and makes a facial expression that's intended to express 'see? see what he's saying?'

It's clear Mindfang has no choice in the matter; she's outnumbered one to everyone else. She slams her hands down onto her desk and huffs, loudly.
"Fine. Marcus, set course-- sent out the orders, get the crew ready to attack. Dashiell, Clarence-- get the flags flying. Lothario, for the love of god, if the canons backfire and the ship catches on fire one more time I will cut your head off with a cake knife." She's moving, quickly, so incredibly quickly that Rosa's rather sure that this was the outcome she was hoping for. "Someone make sure that Lochlann is prepared down in the medic's bay-- the Serpent's hardly going to go down easy and we'll take no quarter."

She begins to dress and Rosa's not at all surprised that she sheds her pajamas incredibly freely in front of her men.

"And for fuck's sake someone find me my fucking dice!" She roars as the men scatter apart to do their jobs.

Rosa watches her from her perch on the edge of the mattress. She's pulled on her pants in a matter of seconds, jammed her feet into a pair of steel toed boots in another few seconds and is pulling on a tight fitting button down in the next moment.

She throws open her armoire and pulls out her coat, the gorgeous work of black wool and blue satin that Rosa's only seen once, on the day they met.

Now that she's familiar with Mindfang's world, she can see that her symbol has been stylized across her breasts in a shade of blue that'd been dyed to the exact color of her blood. The coat is lined in matching silk and the buttons at her cuffs glint red in the sunlight streaming in off the balcony.

"Are those rubies?" She asks, a little incredulously. Not that it would surprise her to see Mindfang using precious gems as buttons but that they're red.

"Of course," Mindfang grins, wickedly, and her fangs look like daggers. "I show no quarter when I go into battle and I think everyone deserves to know that."

"No quarter?" She murmurs and Mindfang gives her a glance that shows that she's paying less than full attention.

"If the Empire catches us, they'll exterminate every single one of us as if we're nothing more than minor aberrations." Mindfang murmurs, giving Rosa a long, hard stare out of the corner of her eye. "And we will do the same."

"Good." Rosa surprises them both by saying and then grinning darkly. "Give them hell for me, would you dear?"

Mindfang salutes her and just as quickly, goes back to dressing. It's fascinating to watch her prepare herself to do battle, running a brush through her hair until her curls billow out around her like curtains in the breeze and applying eyeliner with precise motions that place just enough color to make her eyes stand out with startling clarity. Her seven pupils draw Rosa's gaze and she can't help but stare.

She throws a belt around her waist, one made from thick black leather that looks as if it could easily be used to strangle a man. Mindfang pulls a cutlass from her closet and places it onto her belt, followed by several daggers-- some of which go into the side of her boot.

It's fascinating to watch her arm herself, with both weaponry and her own ridiculously off-putting beauty which Rosa supposes is what makes her so infamous.

Rosa slips out of bed, slowly, as Mindfang begins to search for something in the drawers of her vanity table. She dresses herself quickly, taking far, far less care with her appearance. The dress she
wears is black, as always, falling just beneath her knees instead of her ankles as she usually prefers. They need to do laundry, and with Rosa convalescent that hasn't been happening because-- well-- Mindfang might be clever and beautiful and a titan in motion but she's dreadful at menial chores.

She wraps her green shawl around herself and sinks onto the couch as she watches Mindfang swan around the room, preparing herself to do battle.

She's looking for something, clearly, and while Rosa would like to assist her, she doesn't think Mindfang's paying any attention to her right now or that gaining her attention is a good idea. Eventually, Mindfang discovers what she's searching for in the pocket of the coat she's wearing, a fact that elicits a string of profanity that makes Rosa wince.

It's a tube of lipstick and Rosa's reasonably sure it's going to be the gorgeous red she always wears but when she applies it-- it's blue. As blue as the sea or the sky or, well, her own blood.

It looks good. Really good.

Mindfang apparently agrees, because after admiring herself in her full length mirror, she smiles and then-- abruptly-- turns her attention to Rosa.

"If you so much as leave that bed while I'm gone I will chain you there for the next month do you understand me?" Mindfang hisses, storming over and grabbing her jaw to yank her face close.

Rosa swallows and then nods. Mindfang's face is cold and hard, without any trace of emotion.

"Yes, Mistress," She murmurs, softly, when she only gets a furious snarl in response to her wordless acknowledgement.

Mindfang releases her with a growl and then kisses her, savagely, fangs cutting into her lower lip. Rosa kisses her back and soon they're both covered in blue lipstick. Mindfang realizes this with a strangled groan and hands Rosa her handkerchief. She takes it without comment.

"You understand that this is serious, don't you?" Mindfang intones, softly, giving Rosa a frown. "This isn't playtime for us; this is life and death for my men and myself. We will all go over to that ship and not all of us will come back."

"I understand." Rosa breathes, trying to pretend that she doesn't know there's a chance Mindfang won't come back. She hasn't seen her do battle or argue or even do something anymore more frightening than bash her head into the wall--

Mindfang frowns even more, narrowing her eyes. "It's a Merchant ship, from the Empire. It's their biggest vessel and if we can take it, that means that a lot of my men will be able to retire happily. And it's not going to be easy, Rosa--"

"If I'm going to be sleeping in your bed, I hardly see how any of this information is relevant." She tells Mindfang, as gently as she can. "You don't need to justify yourself to me."

"Thank you." Mindfang mutters, hugging her tightly. "Be a good girl while I'm gallivanting."

"Yes, Mistress," she says, giving her the biggest smile she can manage. "Go make me proud to be yours."

Mindfang nuzzles her. Rosa wants to kiss her but-- well-- it had taken a little too much work to get that lipstick scrubbed off.
She slips out of the room without giving Rosa a chance to say goodbye. The sudden silence in the room places sudden pressure onto her chest and suddenly she's struggling not to cry.

What in fresh hell is she supposed to do now? Sit here, clearly, but-- well-- she can't do that. Rosa's about to break down into tears, horrible gut shaking tears but the door opens and Mindfang shuffles back inside.

"Forgot my hat--" She claims, with a tight smile, and Rosa all but tackles her, pulling her into her arms and clinging to her.

"Goodbye," Rosa mumbles, voice all but inaudible against her neck. "Stay safe."

"Annora--" Mindfang says, her voice hitching. She winces at the use of her name, but allows her to get away with it. "Annora, if anything happens to me, you do whatever Marcus says, do you hear me?"

"Mistress--"

"And for fuck's sake, if the last thing you say to me is 'yes Mistress' I'm going to go to my grave a very vengeance bent woman."

Rosa nods against her chest. "Yes Mistress."

"Annora--"

"Come back to me, Vienna." She breathes, kissing her cheek and lingering. "Come back to me in one piece, won't you?"

"I will." Mindfang vows with a solemn smile. "Cross my heart and hope to die."

"Okay." She replies in a small voice, meeting Mindfang's eyes and forcing herself to remain steady in the face of her unrelenting stare of all eight of her pupils zeroing in on her face.

Mindfang makes a sound that's a cross between a trill and a screech, a noise of distressed affection that Rosa can barely interpret.

"Can I come watch you get ready?" She mumbles and, after a few moments of terse silence, Mindfang nods.

* * *

The ship is full of an insane sort of bustle; Mindfang's men are absolutely everywhere, on the rigging, at the helm, rolling canons out everywhere. Rosa's lead to the bridge where she's allowed to stand near the wheel.

"Just have a look around and go right back." Mindfang tells her, firmly. "And you do everything Marcus says if I'm not here, do you understand me?"

She nods. "I just want to see what she looks like at full battle."

"I can't say I can't admire that urge." Mindfang mutters, adjusting her hat. Rosa reaches up and straightens the feather in her brim. Her Mistress wrinkles her nose and makes a noise that indicates 'I do not like' but Rosa doesn't relent until she's satisfied.

The Widow looks beautiful, her sails billowing in the wind as she picks up speed, each crew member dressed in his finest gear. It's a sight to behold, it truly is, and if they weren't preparing to attack Rosa
would be elated to see it all. As things are, she only remains at the wheel long enough to take in the sights.

The last thing she stares at is the flag being pulled to the top of the mainmast. There's never been a flag there before, to Rosa's knowledge, and she must remember to interrogate Mindfang about pirate protocol in the future.

The Widow's flag is sewn from a rectangle of linen as red as her son's blood. It makes her breath stop in her throat because it's the last thing she expected to see-- that beautiful red flown as a sign of danger and fear.

But it makes her feel less afraid, somehow, standing taller and smiling proudly. There's a design worked into the flag, a horned skull and crossed cutlasses--

And as the wind catches it, she can't help but laugh a little because someone has defaced the skull and given it eight little eyes, a pair of seven and one.

"I like your flag, boys," She tells the pair of sailors who are working the wheel and guiding the ship. "Very lovely."

Mindfang and Marcus, stepping out of the wheelhouse, come to her side. Mindfang hugs her once more and gives her a gruff: "I'm serious about changing you to that bed. Don't make me worry."

She breathes in one last lungful of Mindfang's perfume and breathes into ear, "Yes Mistress."

Marcus gives her an even tighter hug and kisses her forehead. She lingers against him, curling her fingers into the careful tailoring of the Navy coat he's clearly stolen.

"Stay safe." He reinforces, murmuring into her ear. "We'll be back as soon as we can."

Rosa nods and, after hugging them both once more for good measure, descends the stairs to the main deck. She wishes every man she passes good luck as passionately as she can and they all seem too distracted to notice but it makes her feel better to give them her blessing.

The last image she glimpses before she vanishes into the cabin is Mindfang standing at the railing of the bridge. Her hair is blowing back in the wind, her coat billows at her sides and her hat looks absolutely magnificent.

She looks like a goddess as she stands there, tall and proud at the helm of her ship. Her face is open and bright to the dawn spreading over the horizon and the blue of her eyes is visible even from where she stands, so far away. She's beautiful and Rosa can barely swallow past her sudden enthrallment with the image of Mindfang as a pirate. Her face is ready for anything the world can throw at her and Rosa, for one, is eager to watch her go.

Because no matter what happens to either of them, and no matter what she tells her--

Rosa's glad not to be dead if only so she can feel, for the first time, that she's alive. Alive to suffer and alive to smile; alive to do everything she'd always dreamed she would when they sealed her underground at 18 to await her death and all the things she said goodbye to with the loss of her child. The sailors around her aren't a replacement for her family; nothing could ever come close to that--But once again she's found a home. And she's going to be damned if anything happens to it.
or in which the author sort of loses control of the story.

Chapter Summary

Rosa is sad. And then drunk. And then sad. And then angry. And then even angrier. And then she and Mindfang get into a screaming fight about the moral values of adult behavior. It's not at all mature.

Chapter Notes

I don't know what happened with this chapter, but happy birthday Karkat and happy upd8 day.

Please don't judge me for the content of my chapter; it had to have a more humorous ending after I made myself cry with the sad feels.

Rosa waits in Mindfang's cabin like a faithful hound, curled up on the couch before the fire. She has her knitting in her lap, and, for once, she's attempting lace. There's no rhyme or reason to her schematic; she has a rough design on a scrap of stationary in her lap but it's not much more than a few penciled in lines.

The yarn beneath her fingers is a beautiful wool that feels like it's been taken from the world's most spoiled sheep, with just the barest hint of a halo surrounding it. It's been dyed a rich midnight blue and as she knits up several inches, it begins to form a fabric with a beautiful drape and the best sort of sheen.

Her work is not fast going or particularly inspired. She doesn't even know what the final form of this piece will take; a shawl, a stole, a blanket-- any flat fabric with lacework, really. Her hands are trembling as she tries to make needlepoints slip through loops and she must breathe slowly through her nose to keep from screaming.

It only takes twenty minutes for her to throw her needles down with a huff and storm over to the door. Her fingers freeze on the doorknob, however, and she swallows. Although Mindfang has never outright beaten her, she's reasonably sure that she wouldn't be afraid to. Mindfang isn't stupid. Emotionally inept, yes, and easy to coerce, but not stupid. And when she's made up her mind on something, there's nothing that will alter her decision.

Rosa has been around the ship enough to know that the riding crop that live in the umbrella stand isn't for show or a remnant of a bygone career as a farmhand. As far as maintaining naval order goes, Mindfang isn't the strictest captain, but she doesn't tolerate anything that could turn into trouble. Pushing her on this particular point might not end well. Not that Rosa doesn't think crying wouldn't get her out of any serious consequences but-- well--

She's also not entirely sure that Mindfang wasn't serious about chaining her to the bed. Considering that she's still reluctant to allow her out of bed, she's probably be more than happy to make sure Rosa couldn't do anything more strenuous than lie in bed and do nothing but wait for her to return.
Mindfang won't hesitate to use that crop to keep order when she sees fit. And while Rosa has only felt it against her skin in soft caresses and gentle slaps that do nothing more than startle her to attention when she'd fallen asleep while waiting before the fire, Mindfang won't *hurt* her; she won't attack her savagely, she won't kick her or punch her or thrash her. But shove her into a wall? Drag her around by her collar? Yes.

There's a difference between brutality and tempermentalness. Is that a word? She doesn't think so. But Dualscar is brutal, cruel-- Mindfang is temperamental and driven by fear. She doesn't want Rosa hurt, but she's a woman used to wielding pain as a tool in her repertoire of exacting discipline from her men and, all things considered, she probably wouldn't lose more than a few hours’ sleep over taking a crop to her back.

(All things considered, Rosa isn't sure how threatened she is by that prospect after spending so much time under Dualscar's watchful eye, but somehow she thinks neither of them really want to resort to violence at this point in their relationship.)

So Rosa forces herself to return to the couch. She sits there with her hands in her lap and tries to distract herself from imagining what could be going on outside.

Sitting there isn't at all effective, of course, so within the space of minutes she's making their bed. Two minutes later she's dusting the bookshelves and in twenty minutes she's arranging Mindfang's clothing by shades of blue and amount of ornamentation.

For the love of all things holy there isn't a single thing to be done in this room. Rosa frowns at the sight of everything around her in absolute perfect order and wonders about the merits of beginning the arduous process of organizing Mindfang's books when she hears the faintest 'thump' from somewhere outside.

There's no reason for it but, suddenly, her heart is pounding in her chest. She makes a nervous noise, realizes Mindfang isn't there to hear it, and then swallows it. There's the sound of another 'thump' and she swallows.

Perhaps it's her imagination-- thump-- there can't be anyone outside-- thump-- there's absolutely nothing--

"There's a balcony, look," Someone shouts and Rosa swears.

No. No that's not nothing. Damnit all. What the hell is she supposed to do? She can't leave the room which is definitely a fact that she'll be throwing in Mindfang’s face the moment she gets back, and like *hell* is she going to try to hide because heaven knows that won't work--

There's the sound of something metallic scraping against the wrought iron railing of the balcony; she slips into the shadows by the cabin door and frantically begins to sort through the variety of things Mindfang has stuffed in her umbrella holder. She'll be fucked if there's actually an umbrella in there--

Yes, alright, that is an umbrella but it has a pointy bit at the end so it's really more of a lance, isn't it? Ugh. Not helpful. Who in their right mind uses a lance as a defensive weapon? By the time you murder someone, you're so stuck that you can't reuse it in the same fight--

She fumbles through everything until she finds a sword. It's battered and not at all pretty, but it's got a good edge to it, still, and it feels well-balanced in her hands.

Rosa sinks onto the couch and rearranges herself, knitting in her lap and back elegantly straight. Her borrowed sword sits neatly on the floor at her feet, just within reach.
Lovely. Just lovely. Mindfang is never going to let her out of her sight after this. She begins to knit once more, eyes narrowed. Her chest is tight and her throat is stinging and she can't decide how to classify how exactly she's feeling.

This isn't fear. She knows that much. She's faced far worse odds than this. Sure, she's never fought with a set of broken ribs or an arm that-- while not useless-- is weak. But she's vanquished untold hoards of poisonous serpents twice her size while protecting broods of children, she fought off a veritable army of the undead in the desert with an infant in her arms and nothing more to defend her than her a scythe with a worn-down blade and damnitall she took down a squadron of the Empress's finest the day they came to take her son-- she's not about to fall at the hands of a few rogue pirates hoping to steal some treasure while the captain's away.

Her heart is still thudding, all the same, when the doors to the balcony finally swing open. They are pirates, but they're certainly not any of Mindfang's men. The sailors on the widow aren't necessarily about to win any competitions for beauty or charm, but they're a clean cut bunch and keep themselves in a presentable fashion. This group of men, all four of them, look as haggard as runaway revolutionaries; their clothes are filthy, their eyes are wild and not a single one of them has properly shaved.

It's probably their clothing, however, that makes Rosa decide she isn't about to relent. There isn't the slightest effort to look even remotely decent and it somehow strikes her as disrespectful. They have to be runaways from the Serpent Mindfang has just taken for her own-- there's enough signs of fresh battle on them to confirm that.

Rosa forces her eyes to remain on the line of her yarn, forces her fingers to keep moving in small revolutions, inexorably drawing the string together into lace. She can hear every movement of the men as they hesitate upon seeing her, heart pulses race and breathes intake sharply. She can hear muscles tightening around hilts of swords, fingers twitching to dive for weapons--

"Oh," She gasps, glancing up from her knitting with the most perplex face of bemusement she can muster, given the fact that she automatically wants to dive for someone's throat. "Oh my, I'm so dreadfully sorry, gentlemen. I didn't mean to be rude, but I didn't know we were expecting company."

Whatever this ragtag band was expecting from her, this was not it. They shift, anxiously, unclear of what to do. They look to their leader, the tallest troll who's filthy with blood, for instruction. He meets her eyes and she gives him a passably sincere smile.

"I'm so sorry, but the Captain isn't here at the moment. If you'd like to sit down and wait, however, I'm sure she'll be back shortly--"

"We're not houseguests." He says, shortly, as if clearing that up is going to be somehow effective in altering her behavior. True to herself, Rosa simply makes her face more confused and frowns.

"Really now? Well, I do suppose that makes more sense; I usually know if we've invited company. But unexpected visitors are hardly a burden; we don't really see anyone, these days. One of the drawbacks of nautical life, I suppose."

He gives her a blank stare. Someone in the group begins to laugh and, it's more than obvious that they've been placed off guard. Rosa's glad she left her borrowed sword at her feet and begins to wonder if it would really be that bad to just gouge straight through their eyes to their probably miniscule brains with her knitting needles. Although, that would be a rather pointless waste of otherwise lovely yarn--
The leader clears his throat and takes a few steps forward. His posture is menacing, especially considering his massive size, and as Rosa's eyes travel up his massive frame she realizes that she might be in danger of accidentally scratching the ceiling when she murders him.

A shame, really, since the ceiling has rather lovely baroque carving. It's going to take forever to refinish that, she's sure, considering that Mindfang doesn't seem at all perturbed about the state of her decor--

"Are you stupid?" He asks her, slowly, his voice drawling just a little no the last word.

"Are you stupid?" She snaps, before she can stop herself. "Honestly, showing up to someone's home uninvited without bringing so much as a fruit basket! Your lusus would be ashamed of you."

She doesn't really know that. All that she knows about lusii is that they have a tendency to be needlessly violent, a little stupid and oftentimes terrible guardians. Her own lusus was an exception to the rule, being rather exacting about manners and proper table etiquette which, living in a cave underground, didn't prove to be very useful at all.

"We're going to murder you and steal this ship and you're worried we didn't bring a fruit basket?" He repeats, slowly, his face finally fully relaxing because, honestly, it is a rather stupid thing to be worried about considering the circumstances. "C'mon men, let's go. She won't be a problem."

"Now see here!" Rosa snarls, rising quickly and throwing down her knitting. She narrows her eyes and bares her fangs but it doesn't at all faze them, although they stop advancing to stare at her once more. "I understand that fruit is a rare commodity while sailing, but the least you could have done was brought a bottle of wine!"

"Lady, we're not your guests--"

"I can see that, since I'm used to associating with a far more intelligent clientele." Rosa sniffs, crossing her arms. "I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

This is ridiculous. What the hell is she doing? It would have been far more expeditious to simply dispatch them with a few sword strokes; take down the first man before he'd climbed the rope up onto the balcony then cut the rope before anyone else could advance, then drop something heavy into their rowboat.

But, of course not. This is the Black Widow and they do things to a higher standard here. Possibly. She isn't really sure about that one, but she does know that their captain has a flair for the dramatic and, well, Mindfang would be so disappointed to hear she simply murdered them without any attempt to mediate the situation.

Either way, true to expectations, they do not depart. They look at her as if she's a patient in a rather lax mental ward full of persons who are a bit daft but absolutely harmless, and continue past her.

That's probably what does it. Before the first one can reach the door, she's lunged for her sword. No one sees her do it, of course, which is rather a blessing.

She manages to grab the last of the pack by his hair before he takes two steps past the couch. Her arm curves around his neck like the string of a bow, the angle of her elbow crushing his windpipe like a vice. In a well-practiced gesture she shifts to the side ever so-slightly and adjusts her grasp on her sword.

As his eyes fix upon the point of the blade looming up before him, she grins and her eyes narrow to slits. Beneath the pressure of her hand she can feel his heart pounding like a frightened rabbit's,
desperately attempting to escape the grasp of a hungry wolf. He draw in a breath to summon his companions but before the words can leave his lungs, she drives the sword at an upward angle straight through his chest.

The muscles of his diaphragm give away with a sudden release of tension. The blade slips up beneath his ribcage, neatly, and she fan feel flesh given way as the sword's point scrapes past the bone of his spine to pierce through his shoulder blades. His deadweight is almost more than she can bear and so she allows him to fall, lunging forward and pulling her weapon free as she advances. The rest of them turn at the sound of their companion's death rattle as he expires, quite quickly, on the floor.

She wants to inform them that it's all their fault that she's going to need to replace the rug, now. But three to one is still a precarious probability. Still in a state of shock, the second sailor is just as easy to dispatch. This time, she doesn't bother attempting to make things subtle.

Rosa kicks him, hard in the groin. Despite himself he doubles over and she seizes the chance, grabbing him by one of his rather sharply pointed horns, and dragging the edge of her sword across his neck. He lets out a horrified gurgle that sends blood spraying out of his wound like a broken faucet. It's not at all pleasant. Rosa drops him immediately, grimacing at the feel of blood all over her face.

"That's unpleasant." She mutters, glaring at her two remaining victims. "I'm going to have quite a bit of difficulty cleaning this mess up, you know."

They're still shocked which is a rather pleasant circumstance. When she crosses the few steps to the closest remaining man, he's pulling out her sword. She ducks beneath his folded arm and draws her blade up across his stomach. He doubles over, clutching his stomach, and Rosa mutters "sorry dear" before shoving him to the floor.

"I'd really prefer not to kill you," Rosa murmurs, quietly, to the man standing before her, his weapon shaking in his hands. "If you depart, I won't have any qualms to carry."

He hesitates, raising his sword.

"I will kill you." Rosa states, simply, hefting her own weapon. "I'm quite used to killing, you know."

He drops his sword and raises his hands. Rosa gives him a smile and gestures to the balcony door. "Depart before my better judgment overtakes me."

He scrambles from the room and out to the balcony. Instead of clambering down the rope, he dives into the water. She hears him scramble into the rowboat and then hears frantic rowing--

And then Rosa's left alone once more. Mostly alone, rather, because her third victim is still dying on the floor at her feet. She huffs, a little irritated, and kneels down beside him. She inspects the wound she's made and realizes, yes, that's a lethal wound.

"Do you want me to finish the job?" She asks, quietly, raising her eyebrows. He stares at her and makes a horrible noise then nods.

"You're horrible." He manages to groan. "How could you--"

"You came to my home with the intention to do harm to it." She murmurs, frowning. "I take no joy in harming anyone."

With his eyes still trained on her own, she slits his throat. As the life drains out of him, she reaches
forward and closes his eyes.

That wasn't particularly hard, now was it? Honestly. She sighs, loudly, and stands. Is she horrible? Rosa can't tell anymore. Fifty years ago she would have been sick to her stomach at the thought of hurting someone, let alone murdering them. But twenty years of slaughtering children have hardened her heart and thirty years doing anything—

anything to keep her son alive have given her a horrible immunity to the pools of gradient blood seeping across the floor.

"I'm sorry," She breathes, softly, to the corpses on the floor of Mindfang's cabin. "Really. I am."

* * *

There isn't any use in cleaning up so she leaves things as they are. She rinses the sword clean in the bathtub then cleans her own face and hands. She should feel something about this, shouldn't she? Other than mild irritation and slight disgust with her own lack of horror.

Rosa sinks back onto the couch and resumes knitting once more, as if nothing has occurred. She knits for another forty five minutes before she hears noise outside of the cabin once more. This time it's clearly the crew of the Widow.

Marcus's voice is ringing out, loudly, across the deck and she can hear raucous laughter. Rosa lets out a breath of relief and mutters the verse of a blessing. She didn't realize she was so worried about him until she realized he was safe.

The activity goes on outside for a ridiculous amount of time before someone comes to see her, for which she is relatively grateful. Another few minutes of peace and quiet before she has to find a way to explain the three dead men on the floor.

Marcus is the one to knock. "Rosa? Y'alright?"

"Yes." She replies. It's not a very convincing yes because he knocks again.

"Lemme in and make sure." He calls, knocking again. "Rosa, c'mon, open the damn door so I can go get drunk already."

She huffs and throws down her knitting. The path from the couch to the door is covered in blood and she pretends she doesn't see that or that her feet are covered in brightly colored splotches.

Rosa unlocks the door. She opens it a crack and blinks at Marcus who, rather surprised, blinks back.

"Rosa?" He asks, raising his eyebrows. "May I come in?"

She stares at him, wide-eyed. "No. No I don't think you want that."

"What? Why not?"

"I'm cleaning. It's not nice. I don't want you to see it like this."

"Rosa, you're being fucking weird. Let me in." Marcus shoves his shoulder against the door. She has no choice but to allow him inside. He makes it only three steps into the room before he stops, swears and turns to stare at her.

"ROSA WHAT HAPPENED?!" He shouts, eyes wide and horrified.

"They showed up without a fruit basket." Is all Rosa can think to say because, really, explaining that she murdered them for attempting to rob her will only get someone in trouble. "And when I asked
them to leave they weren't particularly considerate of my feelings."

"Rosa, this is-- this is-- you just-- you killed them." Marcus is horrified. Rosa wonders if it's because they're dead or because she killed them because, well, either reason is equally likely.

She shrugs. "I had no wish to die at their hands. So I took care of it. Would you at all mind helping me dispose of the bodies? With my injuries I'm not quite able to manage--"

Marcus claps his hands on either side of her face and pulls her close. She blinks at him, bewildered, and frowns.

"Rosa you murdered three men."

"I let the fourth go, yes."

"Why the hell did the Captain make you stay behind?"

"Because I'm her sex slave that she still has yet to have sex with? I don't really know what you're getting at--"

Marcus groans, wrinkles his brow and shakes his head at her. "You're not hurt, my dear girl, are you?"

"No. Not at all." She murmurs, folding her hands before her. "They were dead before they could defend themselves."

"Thank god." Marcus mutters, hugging her tightly. She hugs him back until he mutters: "You know I'm going to have to tell the captain about this, don't you?"

That's, well, not nearly as comforting.

* * *

It's hard to say what is travelling across Mindfang's face. Emotions, of course, she's not quite that disturbed. But Rosa can't understand what emotions they're meant to be. Fear? Anger? Happiness? Some subset of them? Terror? Rage? Elation? None of the words she knows to define the summation of brain and heart are apt to describe the look on her face. She just stands there, her face written in a language Rosa can't decipher.

She takes a few steps further, boots dragging through the pools of blood that have spread around the forms of the vanquished men. From the doorway, with Marcus's hand clamped on her shoulder, Rosa winces. It's not a pretty scene and she wishes no one was forced to witness it but her. She's not used to having witnesses to the swathes of destruction she wreaks.

Partners in arms, yes. Children to protect, of course. But never witnesses, people who would stumble upon the aftermath of an encounter without knowing what occurred or what to expect. Marcus, beside her, looks downright shaken, his face pale and eyes carefully averted from the scene. He's holding her arm so tightly she's in danger of having to ask him to let go, and she can't discern if he's clinging to her out of a fear that she'll attack again or something less obvious--

"Did you do this?" Mindfang asks, softly, crouching down beside her first victim. She rolls over the body and inspects the wound and makes a noise that sounds slightly admiring if that's even a possibility--

Rosa nods. Mindfang, of course, doesn't see, and repeats the question: "Did you do this?"
"Yes." She whispers, feeling nothing.

Mindfang straightens, slowly, and Rosa sees her wince when she puts weight on her left leg. A flicker of concern begins to rise, like the kindling of a fire catching ablaze beneath damp wood.

"Are you all right?" She asks, nudging another one of the men with the point of her boot and snorting a little. "Not hurt, are you?"

"No, Mistress."

"She okay?" Mindfang asks Marcus, who confirms this face with a quiet murmur of affirmation. Rosa rolls her eyes, because, honestly? But she supposes it's a rather warranted question, given the circumstances and remains quiet.

Mindfang surveys the room once more before returning to face her. Her expression is still unfathomable and Rosa stares into her eyes, blankly, as if refusing to make any expression herself will somehow make this confrontation easier--

"I'm so sorry you had to do this, darling," Mindfang murmurs, reaching out and brushing her hair away from her face. Rosa flinches a little but Mindfang ignores that, as she usually does. "You poor thing."

"Why?" Rosa asks, raising her eyebrows. "It wasn't at all an imposition."

This is not the correct response. Mindfang’s face crumbles and she looks bewildered and just a little nervous. "I know, Rosa, but, I hate that you'll have to remember doing it--"

"You seem to be under the delusion that this is the first time I've been obligated to do something like this." Rosa replies, before Mindfang is able to finish her thought. The words leave her mouth with a condescending note, the faintest aura of darkness creeping in on the edges.

Mindfang recognizes the abyss, not the disdain. She shivers a little and Rosa sees despair begin to rise up in her brain.

"You're being purposefully brash." She grumbles, yanking Rosa's head down so that she can kiss her forehead without bending her neck. "Marcus, get this shit cleaned up."

Rosa glares at her. "Don't trivialize me."

"Don't try to be a badass motherfucker without anything to back it up."

"I think you're the motherfucker in this situation." Rosa grumbles. Mindfang stares at her and Marcus freezes beside her.

Then, without warning, Mindfang dissolves into hysterical laughter. She laughs so hard that she falls over. Marcus stares, his eyebrows arched up halfway to his forehead.

"Does anyone want to--?"

"I was the mother of the Signless." Rosa supplies, watching Mindfang roll around the floor. Oh god look at that. She looks ridiculous and she's going to be utterly covered in other people's blood--

"Oh." Marcus says, as if she's simply told him it's sunny out. "Oh. Well. That makes sense."

To date, that's the best reactions she's gotten.
The men celebrate their victory almost the entire night. It's a beautiful thing to see and she watches from the railing of the bridge as they celebrate. Mindfang's down there with them and while Rosa, on one hand, wants to celebrate with her, she's also rather preoccupied with her sorrow.

She wants to be alone. But not *alone*-- just-- find some room to think. Marcus comes to her side eventually, bringing a plate of food and a half-bottle of wine.

"I'd like to get alone for a bit, if that's quite alright," She murmurs, softly. "Is there anywhere I can sit?"

He points to the roof of the wheelhouse behind her and says, quietly, "I'll fetch you the ladder, Rosa."

She's up there for hours. Hours and hours-- watching them celebrate. It's nice to see, really.

Mindfang finds her, eventually, sitting up on the roof of the wheelhouse. She clambers up the ladder with the ease of a spider spinning silk. Rosa laughs at her a little bit as she peers up at her, eyes shifty.

"*There* you are, darling," She says, more than a little relived. "Marcus said you'd gone to bed."

"Did he?" Rosa asks, arching her eyebrows and making a mental note to thank him later.

Mindfang makes a face at her. It's a silly face, her features crumpled up like a drawing on paper, and her haphazardly combed hair is billowing out in curls around her. "I couldn't find you, I was worried. What in the world are you doing up here?"

She shrugs and sits up a little more, acting as if she's stretching so she can avoid Mindfang's eyes. "I wanted to be alone."

"Oh. Oh, I see." Mindfang blinks a few times and then frowns, deeply. "I-- I hope you know you don't have to hide from me--"

"I wasn't trying to hide from you." Rosa murmurs, smiling a little. Mindfang smiles back. "I just wanted to... collect my thoughts."

"Do you want me to go away? I don't mind, really, I don't." Mindfang says, frowning. "I know you had a bad day."

It's sweet how concerned she gets when she's been drinking. Rosa almost wants to reach over and pat her head. But instead she shrugs a little and, despite her better instincts, smiles once more. "It's fine."

"Can I come up?" She asks, softly, seeming more than a little unsure of herself. It's endearing. Horribly endearing.

Rosa smiles more widely this time, showing her teeth. "Only if you bribe me properly." She purrs and Mindfang lets out a trill that could almost be described as *nervous*.

"I can bring alcohol, a blanket and whatever food I can pry out of Chef's hands." Mindfang replies, arching her eyebrows. "We can have a picnic."

Rosa gives her sloppy grin, showing far too much teeth. "It's after midnight and we're in the middle
of the ocean."

"That's what makes it romantic." Mindfang mutters, rolling her eyes and huffing. "Damnit, Rosa you make it really hard to be a sweet, affectionate, caring lover when you're so impervious to any sort of kindness."

Rosa laughs. Mindfang reappears after ten minutes, this time climbing up to her with far less alacrity. She throws a blanket at Rosa, a heavy wool one that's oversized and cozy.

A basket appears next. Rosa reaches out and pulls it onto the roof when Mindfang begins to make angry noises of distress and then, finally, her upper body appears. She hauls herself onto the roof like an ungainly dog, specifically a baby Newfoundland who's paws are far too big for her body.

Although, in reality, she's a beautiful, self-possessed woman who's gloriously conceited. She crouches on the balls of her feet and scuttles over, half-standing.

"There now. Nice and cozy." Mindfang coos, leaning in and nuzzling her cheek. Rosa nuzzles her back-- its sweet and innocent and absolutely wondrously romantic. Mindfang snuggles up next to her and before Rosa knows it, she's pulling the blanket around them. It is nice and cozy and she feels like a teenager again.

Mindfang has changed since earlier that night; she still has on her knee-high leather boots and worn out breeches but over her button down she's pulled on a sweater that Rosa's never seen. It's a beautiful piece of knitting, covered in gorgeous interlocking cables-- Rosa can't recollect the terminology for it; Anglo-Saxon, perhaps? Celtic? Either way, they're gorgeous interwoven knots that have been stitched into the fabric with stark relief. Rosa runs her fingers over her chest without thinking about it. It's a gorgeous black wool and she can't quite tell what sort of sheep it came from--

"Rosa?" Mindfang asks, laughing a little. She blinks up at her, slowly. "Is my, um, breast somehow upsetting you?"

"This is nice knitting."

"...Rosa. You're wonderful, my Pet, but if you ever say that while copping a feel ever again I will take my crop to your ass."

"Is that a promise, Mistress?"

"...You don't mean that." Mindfang says after a long pause. Rosa watches her as innocently as she can, pretending not to notice her pupils dilating from arousal or feel how her skin warms, slightly. "Darling girl, you really don't mean that."

Mindfang kisses her instead of finishing up the conversation. Rosa kisses her back. Neither of them make a move to deepen it, no one's tongue makes an overture and no one's teeth come into play-- it's a kiss, nothing more.

"Are you quite alright?" Mindfang asks, quietly, when they break away from one another. "You seemed so sad tonight."

"Not when we were dancing," Rosa reminds her with a smile and she snuggles in a little more closely when Mindfang blushes a little. "That was like a fairy tale."

Mindfang blushes even more. Rosa giggles, pulling her knees close to her chest. Her Mistress kisses the crown of her head and pulls the basket over to them.
"C'mon, love, let's get some food in your stomach. You're all skin."

Rosa's skin prickles at the use of the affectionate term 'love'. Prickles in a good way, she thinks. Like the hair on the back of her neck has stood up at the feel of particularly soft fur against her skin. She pretends she doesn't notice the word at all, though, mostly because-- well-- she doesn't think Mindfang means it as love just like she doesn't mean Pet as a domesticated animal.

Hopefully.

She helps Mindfang settle the basket near their feet and then holds the bottle of wine while she searches for the corkscrew. She finds it, eventually, and then produces a pair of crystal champagne flutes.

"We can't use those," Rosa hisses, almost immediately. If she had the ability to move her ears as dexterously as Mindfang can, she'd flatten them against her head. "What are you thinking."

Mindfang is visibly startled. "They're washed, I'm not a heathen--"

"You don't drink wine out of champagne flutes."

"Rosa. Rosa, Pet, it's okay, you're allowed to--"

"I don't like this." She says, her voice hitching. All of a sudden, she's borderline hysterical and it becomes incredibly hard to breathe--"

"Darling, what's life without a little rule-breaking." Mindfang purrs against her neck, lips warm and wet against her skin. It makes her let out a sound like a kitten who's been introduced to water for the first time in her life. Oh my. Oh my that feels nice. She caterwauls again, dropping her head back and squirming a little.

"Get wineglasses." She tries to hiss menacingly, but instead moans. "Wineglasses--"

Mindfang ignores her and starts to kiss her passionately. The wine bottle falls into her lap as Mindfang grabs her by the front of her dress and yanks her close. She kisses her until her breath settles into a pattern of long, breathy moans and little squeaks--

"We're drinking the fucking wine out of the fucking flutes and you're going to stop being a prissy little bitch about tableware." Mindfang grumbles with an affectionate smile.

Rosa doesn't take it personally because, well, it's not the first time she's been told she's a stickler about tableware. Kissing is, in fact, a rather useful way of quieting someone's nerves. Which, of course, Mindfang is well aware of.

They nibble at their second supper which consists of several different varieties of fancy cheese, three quarters of a chocolate cheesecake and a couple of croissants that Mindfang has covered in chocolate hazelnut spread.

It's silly and adolescent but enchanting all the same to have a picnic under the stars. As they eat, they drink-- a lot. The first bottle is finished between the two of them within a half hour, Rosa downing more of it than she should and Mindfang doing the same, considering all the alcohol she's already had.

"Look at the stars," Mindfang croons, sprawling out on her back. She takes the blanket with her and
Rosa's forced to abandon the rest of the cheesecake to seek her warmth. Mindfang drapes an arm over her shoulders and holds her close. "Look at how they glitter."

Rosa makes a happy noise beside her. She's always loved the stars, the way they gleam against the blackness and how beautiful they are, each one of them. It's one of the things she missed most when they told her she had to go underground. Not that she ever knew any of the constellations, but when she had her own little hive in the desert she'd sneak out onto the roof and star up at them--

"You can see so many constellations from this part of the sea." Mindfang says, her voice warm with nostalgia. "This is the best time of the year to stare up at them and marvel--"

Rosa curls into her arms a little more, pressing her nose to Mindfang's carotid and inhaling her perfume. "I don't know any constellations."

"What." Mindfang groans, throwing her arms into the air. "Oh my goodness gracious Miss Rosa, there's so many beautiful things in the world, look at how beautiful these stars of! There's constellations and star families and planets and nebulae-- Look there you can see the second moon, and there you can see the Pleiades, the seven sisters, there's Draco and Virgo and-- oh---- look, there's ursa minor-- look at how you can trace their shapes, look at how you can imagine how beautiful they'd be--"

Rosa listens to her ramble, grinning as she reaches up in the air and sketches out imaginary shapes on a canvas that's hundreds of thousands of miles out in space. She sounds almost like a little girl, so pleased to be able to show off what she knows.

Mindfang's voice is beautiful. She hasn't been lying when she told her that all time times she'd been read to. Mmm this is nice. She feels herself beginning to nod off and forces herself to say words to keep that from happening.

"What's a Virgo?" She asks with a quiet yawn. Mindfang lets out a noise of horror and tries to sit up. Rosa forces her back down with a growl of displeasure that makes her Mistress laugh a little. "Don't be mean, I lived in an underground cave."

"That's no excuse for ignorance, you know, Rosa, you had more than enough of a chance to read and books can be very informative if not always the most amusing pastime-- you can't ever forget that books can tell you almost anything in the world--"

"How drunk are you?"

"Shut up I'm not that drunk, don't be mean." Mindfang grumbles, rolling her eyes.

They both know she's lying. She's been drinking all night and polished off most of the wine bottle and-- well-- she's far more pliant than usual, cozy and warm against her side.

She completely misses Mindfang's story behind the constellation. Rosa wants to ask her to repeat it but she doesn't want to get threatened with her riding crop again. Is that a serious threat? She doesn't know. Is provoking Mindfang a good idea? Probably.

Er. Probably not, she meant. Ugh. Would it really hurt? She's curious, now. Curious in a drunk way. How in the world could she manage that? Is there a proper way to conduct oneself when one is curious about that? Perhaps shoving her off the roof might be effective--

No. No that might be more pain than she's bargaining for. There's finding out whether or not one should fear a riding crop and then there's attempting to get yourself murdered.
"Virgo." She repeats, sighing heavily. "Stay on point, Mistress."

Mindfang groans and sits up enough to retrieve the second wine bottle. She rolls her eyes at Rosa when she makes grumpy cat noises but settles back down beside her all the same.

"Virgo is a bastardization of the name of the first troll who bore your sign, silly," Mindfang mutters. "Honestly. For someone who says she's seen the original Journals--"

"I got to turn the pages."

"Fuck you Rosa." Mindfang hisses, showing her fangs. "Fuck you, you got to turn the pages?!!"

"Youngest one there." She says, smugly but she's still rather intrigued by Mindfang's drunken ramblings. "You know about my ancestor?"

"Well. Yeah, Rosa, haven't you ever checked out the Royal archives? They keep records of everyone's Ancestry--"


"Ugh, fine. There were twelve original ancestors, right? And Min'was one of 'em." She's sounding far, far more drunk now. "And there are twelve major constellations, right?"

"Mmmhmm. Sure."

"Uggh Rosa this is hard." Mindfang gives up telling her story, apparently preferring snuggling to education. "I want to drink wine and eat cheesecake off of you."

"No. I'm not a plate."

"You're making it really hard to be sexy."

"I don't understand while using me as tableware is sexy."

Mindfang starts laughing. She sits up and makes Rosa sit with her and they cuddle close underneath the blanket. The champagne flutes are abandoned in favor of drinking wine directly out of the bottle without heed for any possible hygiene issues. Rosa would worry about that except for the fact that the time between one of them taking their lips from the bottle and their lips meeting isn't even enough for them to swallow properly.

It's sloppy and more than a little juvenile. It's like they're schoolgirls who have stolen wine from their lusii and are discreetly imbibing on the roof of their hive.

In this metaphor, Mindfang is definitely the younger girl who turns out to be a terrible influence and Rosa's the one who was assigned to keep her in check but ended up getting pulled into her web of illicit behavior--

Fuck metaphors, they're drunk and there's kissing and they're in each other's arms.

"I feel bad." Rosa finally mumbles, drunkenly. Mindfang, beside her, makes a questioning sound. "I feel bad. For being happy. I shouldn't be happy."

"Why not?" Mindfang asks, her voice as quiet as a shark in the waves.

"Because they're all dead and I should be too." She whispers. Her words hang around them like a salty mist. There isn't anything anyone could ever say in response to that, not even Mindfang.
"You know," Mindfang says, her voice wistful and almost as soft as the sound of waves sloshing against the hull of the slip as they steadily plow through the ocean. "I always wanted to be great. I wanted everyone to know my name, to know that people thought I was fantastic--"

"Why am I not surprised." Rosa mutters, nuzzling a little closer. Mindfang gives her a tight little smile and wraps the blanket more tightly around them.

"I always wants to be someone you know?" She continues, taking Rosa's hand and tracing out the delicate structure of the bones in her hand. Despite the months of good food and halfway decent living, she's still barely more than skin. "Like your boy."

Rosa wants to freeze as she mentions it. But she doesn't. She makes a sad noise, a little sound that doesn't make either of them flinch.

Mindfang keeps staring up at the stars. Her breath rises above them like the mist of dreams dissolving into the universe "He did great things, you know? People listened to him. I'm sorry we never got a chance to meet."

"Me too." Rosa murmurs, dropping her head onto Mindfang's shoulder. Her head fits perfectly in the dup between her shoulder and collarbone and the wool of her sweater is a scratchy softness beneath her cheek.

Mindfang doesn't move to push her away or even shift her so that she's in less danger of losing an eye to one of Rosa's wickedly pointed horns. "But I guess, when I did grow up, it somehow stopped being a big deal to be a, you know, big deal. I guess-- I guess it matters more now that I live a life I can look back on and feel proud of."

She shrugs. Her hand absently leaves Rosa's and reaches up to brush through her hair, the tips of her fingers grazing the base of her horn. "It somehow stopped mattering that I was famous and became so much more important to know I mattered to the people who had faith in me, you know?"

"No."

"Yes you do, Rosa," Mindfang mutters, her voice getting a little shaking and her passes over her hair growing shaky and off-rhythm. "Do you think your little boy ever forgot, even for a second, how much you loved him?"

"...No." Rosa says, reluctantly, her voice going high and squeaky.

"No matter what you might be thinking, my darling, you'll always be the one who saved him. And don't think that even though you're not dead or infamous or on everyone's lips that you don't matter just as much as he did."

"I love him so much."

"I know, love, I know," Mindfang sighs, softly. She's clearly choosing her words as carefully as she can. "And I guess-- I don't want to upset you-- but perhaps instead of trying to make yourself a martyr, you could find it in you to remember that the gift you gave him was life."

"He'd have been better off without me." Rosa whispers, not trusting herself not to begin sobbing if she tries to raise her voice. "They all would have, every single one of them."

"I'm not a good woman, Rosa. You know that. You've seen that. But every soul on board this ship trusted me enough that they placed their lives in my hands; I matter to them, if only so that they'll get paid." Mindfang laughs a little but it's not a real laugh.
It doesn't ring out like her laughter usually does; it's short and stifled, hidden beneath a heavy cloak of something. "They depend on me. And that's a hard charge to bear on my shoulders. I can't even imagine what it must be like to look after a child but not a single man here begrudges me the happiness I've found with you."

"I don't--"

"And if you're going to try to tell me that your little one, the only man on the face of this planet brave enough-- good enough-- to stand up and remind everyone that things don't have to be this way-- isn't any better than a bunch of disgusting pirates, I'll be damned."

It's a good point. A very good point, in fact. But Rosa's crying too hard to tell her that. Mindfang holds her close as she sobs, wrapping her up in their shared blanket like a cocoon, covering her up completely. She doesn't say a word, but she doesn't attempt to escape either.

"Don't be afraid to be happy just because he's gone. Be afraid to be happy because you're enslaved or you're afraid of water or I hog the blankets at night-- don't be unhappy about things you can't change."

"I don't think I appreciate the irony of the fact that you're giving me life advice when you haven't brushed your hair in six weeks." Rosa manages to sniffle.

Mindfang kisses her forehead and hugs her close. Rosa clings to her, frantically breathing in the smell of her jasmine perfume so she can pretend that even thinking his name doesn't bring back the memory of seared flesh--

"Darling. He loved you. He doesn't want you sad."

She wants to fight Mindfang on this one, protest that she can't know that, there's no way she could know that, not at all in a million years but-- well--

It's the last thing he ever said to her as she tried to cling to him, arms wrapped around his waist, squeezing his hand until they ripped him away--

"Don't worry mom. I'll be fine!" He's shouted, smiling. "I love you!"

She cries harder than she ever has before, bending over her own knees and covering her face. Mindfang rubs her back and doesn't make any attempt to talk her out of crying. She lets her cry for heaven knows how long and then, finally, sighs.

"Fuck me. I came up here to see if you were drunk enough to coerce into sex." Mindfang mutters when she decides Rosa's calmed down enough to be amused.

Rosa laughs a little and that appeases Mindfang's worry.

"You want me to sleep below decks tonight?"

"Does that mean you'll make Marcus sleep on the couch to watch me?"

"Well. Um. Yes. I mean--" She shrugs a little and Rosa feels more than a little affectionate towards her. "I need you. And I won't lose you because you're a moron."

"...I want you to sleep with me, please." She says, finally, nuzzling into her side. "And I want you to kiss me more."
Mindfang grins. She still looks a little sad but she grins all the same. "I can do that much for you, Annora."

"Call me Annora one more time and I will shove you off this roof into the ocean and take over your job." Rosa grumbles, wiping her eyes on Mindfang's sweater.

* * *

When she wakes up the next morning, she's still sad. Sad beyond belief, her heart heavy and eyes worn out. Rosa's incredibly tired, but she forces herself to get out of bed, get dressed and comb her hair. She twines her shawl around her as if it can somehow ward off the worst of her pain.

She does not want to get Mindfang's breakfast. She does not want to get out of bed. She does not want to do anything but stay there and refuse to move.

But she makes herself do it all the same. She shuffles down to the kitchen where, as always, the chef is sitting with his breakfast. There's a few other sailors in the room, for once, and she's shocked because they all had a late night, not just herself and her Captain.

The Chef gives her his usual gloower and she smiles back as best she can then goes to brew the coffee. At this point in time, she's well aware she's getting her own breakfast but she likes to pretend all the same.

Chef seems to be well aware of that because he's begun setting out a plate for her with whatever he himself is eating, usually something quite impressive and rather delicious. Rosa sits down beside him while she waits for the kettle to boil.

She eats, slowly, attempting to pretend that she's not broken inside. Rosa yawns a little and covers her mouth with her napkin. This is terrible. She's exhausted and sad and worn out--

"I'm just saying, George, there's a reason they killed him."

She freezes mid-bite. Then she begins chewing again because, really he could be referring to anyone. She only manages a few more bites before he speaks once more--

"There's no hope in being a revolutionary." One of them mutters, darkly. "He deserved what he got."

She doesn't have any idea what in the world he's talking about. Nor does she need to know because she's awash in a sea of rage, thrumming from her fingertips up to her elbows, turning her organs into embalming fluid and her brain into deep fried jelly and every single reflex going utterly rigid with rage. It's as if someone has paralyzed her common sense, then dropped it into a bowl of broken glass, shaken it around for good measure and then laughed while she was poured into a bucket of vinegar.

Before Rosa knows what's going on, she's flying across the table, kettle in hand. She's bludgeoning him with the teapot before any of the men can react. Her intended victim lets out a screech and tries to defend himself but Rosa's not about to stop juts because he's making an angry noise--

She manages to hit him several times with the kettle before she feels a pair of very strong arms wrap around her ribcage and haul her off.

Someone pulls her victim similarly back until they're panting and snarling at each other across from the room. No one says a word.

"I'm going to tell the captain--" He hisses, and Rosa hisses back--
The Chef is the one holding her back. He lets out a ferocious sound, a horribly ferocious sound and Rosa finds the fight slipping out of her like she's an electronic device that's had her cord pulled from the wall without being informed in advance.

"If you tell the captain what happened, I'll tell her you were talking about politics in the kitchen again and you'll both be dead faster than you can sneeze at," Chef hisses, glaring at both men. "And if you honestly think she'll choose the two of you over this little lady here--"

They both pale. Rosa hisses.

"Now scram and if the First Mate asks, you fell into the hold." He barks, bending down to pick the kettle up off the floor. They vanish quite quickly.

"Y'know, Miss Rosa, I might have only been a passing friend of your son's but I hardly think he'd appreciate that sort of violence." He says, quietly, once the kitchen door has swung shut. "And in the future, if you wouldn't mind limiting your outbursts to the deck, I'd appreciate it."

Rosa nods. She nods until he lets her go and then collapses to the floor. Her head is cradled in her hands and she wants to sob but-- well--

"What did he ever do?" She asks, trying not to cry because this just keeps getting worse these days. "What did he ever do?" She begs.

"You need to go." He mutters, sighing. "Don't get me in trouble. I'm not going to always be here to take care of things and I can't have you making trouble for me."

* * *

She brings Mindfang breakfast and tries to look as if she wasn't just attempting to murder one of her sailors. She's awake, oddly, despite the early hour.

"Is everything okay, Rosa?" She asks, setting aside the breakfast tray to frown. Rosa flinches at the fact that coffee and orange juice is probably going to get all over the nice sheets. "You look like hell-"

"If it wouldn't be too much trouble, Mistress, I'd really rather like the day alone." Rosa cuts her off before she can begin to quiz her. She stares at the floor and tries not to cry--

Mindfang takes her hand and squeezes it, gently. Her fingers are cold against Rosa's and she smells like heaven. "I'll go up to the map room--"

"No. No it's fine. I think-- I think I'll go back to my room." It hurts her to say that but it makes her feel better all the same, as if by knowing that she's made Mindfang sad she's going to make herself feel better.

"...Oh. Oh, okay. Yes. That's fine." It works. She looks tragic. Tragic and beautiful, her skin alabaster silver and "No problem. It's quieter in there."

* * *

Rosa leaves the room without another word. She goes back to her cabin, the little room she hasn't slept in for weeks and all but throws herself under the blankets. It doesn't feel nearly as nice as curling up next to Mindfang and having a good cry but screw it all she doesn't deserve to feel comforted--
Sleep is fitful and broken, full of vivid nightmares that shake her to her very core. Drifting in and out of consciousness takes up her entire day and she tries to think as if she pretends to be dead for as long as she can maybe it'll actually happen. She sits up, eventually, and doubles over

Without conscious thought she begins to scratch at her arms, fingernails digging into flesh without any effort. It hurts. It hurts like she's been stabbed but for whatever reason she doesn't stop until her arms are covered in blood. When she stops it's only because Mindfang knocks.

"Pet, are you quite all right? You've been in there all day." She asks, her voice friendly and calm. It's not at all what Rosa expected after their encounter that morning and she considers how unusual it is for only a few seconds before suddenly struggling not to cry.

"I'm fine, Mistress." She calls out, miserably attempting to hide the damage she's done to her own body. Rosa wraps her quilt around her just as Mindfang throws the door open. She gives Mindfang a guilty stare and Mindfang stares back, looking more than a little skeptical. "Um... May I be of assistance?"

"...Have you just been sitting there like this all day, Pet?"

"I just woke up." She lies, forcing a smile.

"You look like you've been crying, Pet. Are you sure you're all right?"

"Nightmare."

"...Are you lying to me?" She asks, slowly, her eyebrows furrowing.

"No Mistress." She says, softly, bowing her head. Her hair falls out from behind her ears and brushes against her eyelashes.

"Hrmrmrmrmrm." Mindfang sniffs and Rosa's relatively sure she's being stared down by her Mistress but refuses to meet her eyes. Rosa presses her arms closer to herself, as if by allowing the fabric of her dress to soak up the blood will somehow hide her wounds from Mindfang's prying. "...Well, you look like shit. Go back to sleep."

"Thank you, Mistress." She says, lifting her head up enough to give her a tight smile. Mindfang doesn't smile back. She gives Rosa another critical once over and closes the door, leaving it unlocked.

Rosa lets out a long, low sigh and slumps back into her mattress. Her arms are beginning to sting someone fierce as she lies there but for once, she doesn't mind the pain. It's not a good feeling whatsoever, but it takes away some of the guilt for the moment. She falls back asleep curled up on herself, face hidden beneath her pillow.

Mindfang stops back in a few hours later, she thinks, because in between a pair of vivid dreams she recollects a hand stroking over her forehead and asking quietly: "Pet are you awake?" and mumbling "I can be?" in return before blankets were wrapped around her once more.

Exhausted. That's what she is. Exhausted. She can't stay awake any more, can't think about any of this for a second longer. When she's awake her heart feels like it's digging its way into her spine and the only thing that helps is the pain of clawing into her skin. Sitting up with Mindfang only makes things worse because being happy and warm and comfortable when everyone else is dead--

Oh god she's the worst person alive. Rosa lets out a keen and closes her eyes to sleep once more. Sleep, sleep-- it's all that makes things better.
Finally, she's shaken awake. She forces herself to lift her head, even though she wants nothing more than to scream and fall unconscious once more.

"Captain wants you." Marcus says softly, eyebrows raised. "You doing alright, Miss Rosa?"

"Yes, Marcus, thank you." She murmurs blearily, sitting up slowly. "Just give me a few moments to... to... make myself decent."

Marcus bows and slips out of the door.

Rosa sighs, heavily, and drops her head into her hands. She doesn't want to go see Mindfang. At all. Without needing to think too hard about it she slips out of the dress she's wearing, exchanging it for a long-sleeved number. She wraps a shawl around her shoulders too, hoping that perhaps she can use it to ward off emotional suffering. Ugh. This is dreadful.

She slips across the deck with her shawl held tightly around her. Knocking at Mindfang's door prompts a grumpy 'come in' and she slouches inside.

Without thinking about it, she stands before Mindfang's desk and stares at her.

"Are you going to ask me about my day?" Mindfang asks, raising an eyebrow. Rosa can tell that she's expecting an almost immediate response based on the casual way she's swirling the wine around in the bottom of her glass. Rosa watches the sediment swish around in the wine with a flat expression etched into her face.

She doesn't so much as allow her eyes to flicker to her mistress's face, digging her fingernails into the palms of her hands to keep herself from relaying any sort of emotion.

Neither of them want to talk about that morning. Or the evening before. Mindfang wants to, maybe, but Rosa's not about to give in and allow her to do that. She doesn't want to think about anything anymore.

For once, Rosa doesn't want to be cordial and kind and obsequious. She doesn't want to spend the next few hours sitting at someone's feet making them feel like they're worth something. She wants to go back to her room and cry until her lungs collapse, cry until she can't remember what it feels like to breathe normally and sob until her ribs are begging for a reprieve.

Mindfang's patience gives away after only a minute of waiting and Rosa suddenly hears the sharp snap of a boot heel on the floor. The sound makes her sit bolt upright, and her eyes momentarily focus on Mindfang before slipping away once more.

"Rosa," She purrs, her voice slipping out of her throat like the rasp of velvet against roughened fingertips, curling around her ears with honeyed affection. Rosa hears her glass clink as she sets it on the desktop, the crystal resounding with a 'ping'. "Rosa, pet, are you sulking?"

No. She wants to say. No, I'm not. I'm in mourning and you're breaking my reverie so forgive me for feeling less than loquacious this afternoon. Normally she can take a deep breath and stow it all away, bury her panic beneath a sea of serenity and a disposition that radiates peace and understanding. But sometimes it's hard to remember how to be kind and sweet and thoughtful when all the can remember is her world crashing down around her.

She doesn't say any of that because that would take far too much effort and keeping her tongue from sharpening and biting is a struggle in and of itself. She knows none of this is Mindfang's fault— if Mindfang had been involved with any of the tragedy that her darling son's life became, she probably would have laughed so hard at him that no one would have found him threatening in the slightest and
then used the distraction to kidnap him and take him off to the high seas because her darling boy would have loved that-- and-- but she can't help the fury that's welling up the more she thinks.

Mindfang's chair scrapes back against the wood with a painful rending sound that means that the mahogany will have two more trenches dug into it but that's okay because she's too far gone to care about the floor right now unless she can sink right through it into the depths of hell itself. Mindfang clips over to her, crossing the suddenly tiny expanse of the room in several, sharp, exacting snaps of her boot heels on the floor. She stands just out of Rosa's line of sight, far enough away that the toes of her boots aren't even in her peripheral but close enough that she can feel her presence.

"Rosa, I don't appreciate being ignored." She can hear the sound of boot toes tapping on the ground and the sound reverberates through her ear drums like gunfire. "Pet, please, look at me."

She doesn't raise her head. She doesn't shudder away. She doesn't so much as let out a different breath.

"Darling, look at me."

"No thank you." She finally says, doing her best to keep her voice neutral and steady.

"Rosa..." She takes two steps closer and curls her fingers around Rosa's jaw. Each of her fingers is placed with exacting calmness, one finger pad after the other pressing against her skin beside their companions. Mindfang tilts her head back so they make eye contact. They stare at each other for a moment before Rosa tears her face out of her grip and stares pointedly at the ground. She can barely refrain from nipping at her fingers but she knows that there's only so far she can push her illustrious mistress before she finds her head on a pike. So she instead settles for pushing her head into her collarbone deeply enough that manually catching her attention isn't anywhere near quite so easy.

Mindfang lets out a heady sigh. She hears the mutter of a familiar mantra that she still can't understand and then there's fingers weaving through her hair. Rosa expects for her hair to be yanked sharply, for her head to be forced back and to be confronted about her utter lack of decorum, but she isn't. Instead, Mindfang's fingers dance around the base of her horns and rub that one part of her head that never fails to make her purr. Except, this time she doesn't.

Rosa takes a sharp breath and then, before she can stop herself, lets out a furious hiss. Mindfang responds with a growl that makes Rosa's knees turn to jelly and the only thing keeping her from prostrating herself on the floor is the fact that Mindfang's not about to let her go. Well, that and the fact that as the initial effect of the power-play has only succeeded in making her furious.

She tears her head out of Mindfang's grasp and struggles to her feet. Mindfang looks perplexed but reaches down to help her. Rosa lets out a growl of her own, this time revealing her eyeteeth. With a wide-eyed stare Mindfang steps back, arms raised in a gesture of passive surrender.

"Rosa--" She says, eyebrows raised. Rosa, shaking her head and inhaling sharply through her nose, stumbles back into the cabin wall. "Rosa, has something happened? Did someone say something about me again--"

"Not everything's about you." She snaps before she can stop herself, one of her arms wrapped around her waist and the other anxiously fidgeting at her throat. The entire world is beginning to press down on her and up beneath her at the same exact second and she can't see past the stars dancing around the edges of her vision. There's nothing left to steady her, no sense of gravity to pull her back to earth and there's certainly no place to be grounded out here in the middle of the ocean.

She wants to be able to fall to the ground and feel the grass beneath her face and sob into the sands
of the desert and let the forest hide the depth of her sorrow. If there's no one around to see her cry, she supposes she's safe and sound from judgment and won't sorry anyone at all, which is also quite the positive.

But instead of any of that she's stuck in a terrible boat in the middle of a stormy sea without any hope of finding peace or solace or anything to bring her back to the ground.

She wants to take a deep breath and apologize. She wants to say, 'I'm so sorry, I'm dealing with a lot of emotional stress and I feel rather disinclined to discuss it calmly at this time. I'm not used to this sort of independence and this switch up in hierarchy is very upsetting. If you wouldn't mind handcuffing me to my bedpost for a day or two that would be lovely'.

But she doesn't feel like it. She feels like screaming and throwing things and shattering the glass in all of the cabinets and individually shattering each one of her stupid fucking sapphire blue shot glasses against her stupid fucking face because fuck--

"Darling, what's wrong?" Mindfang cuts in, stepping towards her in the slow, calm fashion of a lion tamer struggling to keep her charge from leaping into the circus crowd. Rosa doesn't like it whatsoever and she lets out a pained groan shaking her head more violently than she ever has before, forcing her face into her hands.

It hurts to breathe and smell and see and feel anything; wearing clothes is like torture, every seam digging into her skin like the kiss of a braided whip. She wants to dig her fingernails into her sternum and rip her skin off of her chest then pull her lungs out so she can finally take a full breath.

"Rosa-- oh god-- darling-- darling, just take a deep breath you're going to be--"

"GO AWAY." She manages to gasp past the sudden constriction in her chest, her body going flaming hot and then colder than a glacier wind almost in the breath of a hair. "GO AWAY GO AWAY GO AWAY."

It's like a mantra, the only thing she's able to force out with her breaths and the only thing she's managed to breathe in enough to spit out. Right now, by nautical terms, she's the ship and air around her is a tempest tossed sea. Everything is too much and she just wants to dive overboard. Her vision's playing tricks on her and the flutter of a curtain in the corner looks like the hem of a cloak whipping around the corner and she can swear she smells him here, the queer smell of incense and fresh mown lawn and the sting of lightening as it crosses the ozone. And then she blinks and it's just a curtain, blue brocade tied off with a scarlet ribbon and the only scent hitting her nose is Mindfang's perfume.

Suddenly everything is too much. She wants to sob until the sun goes down and then keep crying a little bit longer, crying until the ocean is full of her tears, permanently tinted a jade green. But she'll be damned if she lets the pirate see her cry. She might not have anything left to her name-- not even her name-- but she has her dignity. She has her pride. She will not cry in front of her, in front of anyone, in front of anyone ever because damnit all she has to have something left in her life that she can call her own and her pride is her last possession.

"Rosa, pet--" Mindfang's looking like her as if she's a lost kitten that's just appeared on her doorstep in the middle of the rain. It's heartbreaking because she looks so full of pity it's almost crossing the border to affection but she knows that's not true because no matter how much she wants it to be she was purchased with her weight in gold and that's what she's worth. Things. Useless things. No matter how much she wants to be pulled in off of the soaked doorstep and wrapped in a clean white towel and left before the fireplace with a bowl of milk, she's not that cat. Mindfang only wants the pedigreed kittens, the slinky white ones with fur the color of clouds and softer than angora that are born with diamonds around their neck not jade strings and--
"WOULD YOU STOP CALLING ME THAT!" She finally catches her breath and the sound of her shout makes Mindfang visibly jolt. They make eye contact finally and Rosa can barely stand it because there goes her imagination once more, putting something into her head that she knows isn't there, a flicker of hurt and a subtle stroke of vulnerability deep within those gorgeous cerulean eyes.

"I just--" Rosa repeats, struggling to catch her breath because it's vanished again as soon as it reappeared. "I just-- I don't-- I can't-- Go away!"

Mindfang bites her lip, one of her pearly fangs peeking out. She folds her hands in front of her in the posture of a little girl giving report on her day's achievements to her father. Or what she imagined that would look like based on the various cultural reports she's read. It's not quite meekness but it's so far from her usual posturing that Rosa is absolutely bewildered. It makes her panic go from disabling to absolutely crushing and she sinks to the floor.

Mindfang lets out a choked noise of worry and then there's a pair of arms wrapped around her and she can smell nothing but jasmine perfume and saltwater taffy.

She lets out a scream that sounds more horrifying than she can believe because-- oh god-- how can that sound come from her own throat. She lashes out at the arms wrapped around her, her breath ceasing entirely because it feels like she's being strangled and she hates it and she hates her and the stupid fucking pirate with the best embrace in the world and so fucking warm and so comfortable and so reassuring because she just wants to lash out at everyone--

Before she knows what she's doing she's dug her nails into the fabric of Mindfang's coat so deeply she can feel the wool start to give way. She wants to sink her teeth into the neck that's just below her jaw and she wants to kick and punch and scream and claw and if the only way to reassure herself is to take the captain down, she's more than happy to do so. She'll take the whole damn ship down with her--

"Rosa, shh--" Mindfang's saying, her voice low and measuredly calm even as the sleeve of her coat finally gives way and bright blue blood wells to the surface of her porcelain skin but she's still not letting go. "Shh, darling, shh just take a deep breath-- you're going to be fine, just breathe--"

She's actually biting now because that makes sense doesn't it if she bites her enough she'll win eventually because that's how it works Mindfang will give up or get angry and she'll make her stop and she needs someone to make her stop before she starts doing something she'll regret and her teeth are sharper than she remembers because now her neck is bleeding like she's been savaged by a rainbow drinker and it's beginning to drip onto the carpet which is terrible because the carpet is new and rather lovely and--

"Darling I need you to breathe, take a deep breath, just count with me, love-- no, Rosa, Pet, if you bite me there I will die, we don't want that do we Pet-- shh just count to three and take a deep, deep breath--"

She doesn't want to. She really doesn't want to and for some reason it seems a little too hard to tell her 'fuck off' because two syllables is too much right now. Instead she renews her assault, with enough capacity or thought that she doesn't go near the carotid this time and focuses her bites on her shoulder. She's doing her best to kick now which isn't very successful since she's sitting on her feet.

"ROSA."

The sound of Mindfang's voice raise above a snarl is enough to startle her into opening her eyes and looking at her mistress again. Mindfang looks on the borderline of panicking, trembling slightly and fighting to keep from losing it just like Rosa already has.
"Darling--" She says, reaching forward once more and stroking her face. "Darling I know you're upset but you need to take a deep, deep breath for me. Can you do that?"

She shakes her head because that makes sense because she can't remember how it feels like to breathe normally and it hurts to breathe and she's dying she's going to die--

Then Mindfang's hands are around her wrists, holding them so tightly she's afraid they're going to break. Her eyes are narrowed to slits and her fangs aren't peeking out, they're fully bared. She looks more frightening than she ever has before and it's a brilliant reminder that the woman who's bed she's been sleeping in every night for the past sweep is one of the sea's most feared killers and she needs to be careful where she steps. "ROSA, BREATHE, DAMNIT! I DON'T WANT TO ASK AGAIN, DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?"

And then she can breathe and air floods into her body with a rush, like the tide sweeping up over the bow of the ship. She gasps and shudders then lets her eyes slip closed. Her shoulders and back feel like the tension has been snipped away from her with a pair of surgical shears.

Her breath feels like it burns but it's good it's wonderful and it's like eating a box of over-priced chocolates.

"Darling--" She says, dropping her wrists as if they're suddenly scalding the palms of her hands. She makes a sound that's a cross between a mauled duck and a trodden upon dolphin and covers her mouth with her hands. She looks like she's about to run screaming from the room.

"Darling, you'll be alright now, won't you?" She asks, desperately, reaching for her shoulders once more as if, this time, to hug her close. "Darling can you say something? Darling?"

"I want you to go away." Rosa says softly, her voice barely breaking above an exhausted whisper. While she can remember how to breathe this time around she feels like she was trodden down by a stampeding herd of hoof beats determined to pulverize her bones into the dust of the earth.

Mindfang lets out a sound of pity and this time does reach forward, brushing her hair out of her face. "What did you say, Rosa, dear-?"

"I want you to leave." She repeats, this time her voice strengthening in volume, bright enough this time that she's sure Mindfang can hear. "I want you to leave me alone."

She self-consciously reached up to her throat as if to fidget with a necklace that isn't even or never has been there. She swallows twice and then frowns, deeply. "Sweetheart, I don't think-"

"GO AWAY." Rosa spits once more, her voice shaking as her temper flares once more. "I-- I just--"

"Okay." Mindfang says, softly, rising slowly and looking no less worried than before. "Okay. Okay, I understand."

* * *

Mindfang leaves without a word more. That's all she does. There's no warning, there's no snarl, there's no comforting embrace. She traces her fingers through Rosa's hair and slips out of the door without glancing back over her shoulder. The ridiculous woman doesn't even stop long enough to scrub the blood off her neck or put on a fresh coat.

Rosa wants to scramble after her and insist that she behaves sensibly. She wants to race up to the bridge with a scarf and a warmer coat and a cup of tea and perhaps those fingerless gloves they picked up in the northern reaches. But it makes her feel like screaming once more to think about
getting to her feet and tracing the steps that have been worn smooth by Mindfang's tread.

She sits slumped against the wall staring at the dying fireplace instead. I should get up and fix that, she thinks. I should get up and put more wood in. I should put a warmer sweater on and switch the duvet to something heavier. But that's all so much work and all she wants to do is sit there and cry but she can't cry because that means she's going to let Mindfang win, because that's what she wants, isn't it?

Rosa remains there taking deep, agonized breaths through her nose until she starts to fall asleep. She sleeps for a short time, fitfully, and when she's woken she has the faintest memory of a dream, of a little girl she once knew trying tell her something over and over. Then the little girl becomes a little boy, grinning at her while she chases him through a small cottage in the forest. And when she opens her eyes to the sight of a ship's cabin it's all the more devastating.

Marcus is standing over her when she sits up.

"The fuck are you doing?" He grumbles, rolling his eyes. "C'mon, dove, off the floor."

"No." She snaps.

"Annora. Get off the floor." Marcus says, quietly and she flinches a little. He huffs and then, before she can believe it, Marcus is bending over and hauling her off the floor. She screeches and reaches out to claw at him but he immediately says no, sharply and she drops her arms.

He drops her on the bed. Before she can lash out again, Marcus has her hands grasped before her and is gripping them so tightly she knows she has no hope of escape.

"Annora--"

"I hate that name," She snarls. Marcus reaches out and pats her on the head, softly. It's not much use trying to shake her head away so she allows him to keep patting her.

"Shhhh. Shhhh, shhhhh--"

"I'm going to bite your face off." She grumbles, loudly, but he keeps patting her head and ugh fuck this--

"I miss him so much." She whispers. "Can't you just let me go?"

"Damnit Rosa we're not going to let you die! What in the world is wrong with you--" Marcus is off and grumbling, pretending that she hadn't said anything. "Look, Nora--"

Nora. No one calls her Nora anymore. She likes being called Nora and so she glances up from the floor to meet Marcus's eyes. He squeezes her hands and looks more than a little sad. "Nora, we like having you here. So can you try to think of us, too?"

It's decent reasoning. But she still misses her son--

"Look, Rosa, we've got two choices here-- I can find the rest of the horse tranquilizers--"

She growls.

"Or you can take a deep breath, acknowledge that you're only hurting yourself and not helping you dead child whatsoever--"

She snarls but starts to cry anyways. Marcus shushes her once more and again, starts to pat her head.
"Would you stop that?" She hisses, loudly. "I'm not a child."

"Really, Rosa? Really? Look at you--" He makes a frustrated noise and grabs her arm. Before she can protect herself he's pulled back her sleeve. "For the love of all things-- Rosa--"

"Don't tell her." She asks, softly, even though she knows he's totally going to dammit all. "Don't tell her, please--"

"Why? Why because you don't want her to be upset? If you don't want to upset her, don't hurt yourself!" Marcus groans, sounding increasingly more frustrated. "You silly, silly girl--"

He makes a frightening sound. "I can't do this. I can't do this-- I just-- I have to get Vi."

It takes her a few minutes to process who in the world Vi is. There's only a few logical conclusions and as Marcus storms towards the door, she puzzles it out, rapidly--

"I don't care if she doesn't like seeing you cry, it's her job to deal with it!" He shouts, turning to hiss at her and Rosa growls, loudly.

"It's not her job! It's not anyone's job!" She shouts, trying to stand up and her knees just give out beneath her. Marcus makes a move to help her up and she hisses, loudly. "I can take care of myself!"

"She's in love with you! And you clearly cannot!"

"YOU DON'T KNOW THAT--" Rosa hisses and then lets out an ungodly screech.

Mindfang kicks open the door, looking absolutely frantic. Her eyes are wide and nervous and she looks absolutely ridiculous, hair halfway braided and her jacket unbuttoned. "What in the hell is going on here--"

"She tried to kill herself when you let her sleep in her room alone." Marcus says before Rosa can say anything. "See? See? I told you, look at her arms--"

Mindfang zeros in on her as if she's a particularly rare species of bird she wishes to taxidermy and hang on her wall in order to complete her collection. Rosa's suddenly hit by a wave of fear that almost completely overtakes all of her sorrow. Marcus takes the opportunity to flee the room and she is so going to kick his ass if she makes it out of this alive--

"...Damnit Rosa, you're even worse than that parakeet I had who tried to chew his leg off," Mindfang snarls, hauling onto the bed by the collar of her dress. It's the most violent she's been with her since her second day on board. Without so much as a preamble she's been slammed down onto her bed. Mindfang's still snarling as she stalks across to the other side of the room. Rosa takes the opportunity the slip beneath the blankets, huddling into a ball beneath the sheets. Mindfang is decidedly un-amused by this escape attempt, pulling her from under the quilt by-- yes-- once again grabbing her collar. She pulls her into a sitting position and barks, very much a pirate captain--

"Hands on your head."

Rosa doesn't move. She simply stares, wide eyed.

"HANDS ON YOUR HEAD." Mindfang shouts. Rosa complies with a jolt and a flinch, refusing to meet Mindfang's eyes. One of her arms is yanked forward with a little less ceremony than Rosa expects. Mindfang inspects her wounds critically, growling the entire time. Apparently satisfied that Rosa doesn't need any serious medical attention Mindfang hisses:
"I have half a mind to beat you senseless, you-- you-- you absolutely ridiculous-- you-- DAMNIT Rosa what the fuck were you thinking?"

She keeps shouting as she starts to work on Rosa's left arm, rubbing in some sort of medicated ointment that burns like hell. She can smell tea tree oil and calendula, so at least she doesn't need to worry about infection. But. Fuck that hurts. Rosa lets out a hiss and tries to pull away but Mindfang's less than amused by this because she snarls loudly:

"BEHAVE."

Her arm is wrapped a little too tightly in gauze. Mindfang wrenches her arm back onto the top of her head before switching her attentions to the other side. Her other arm receives the same inspection and treatment. Rosa's arms are beginning to ache and she opens her mouth to complain but Mindfang cuts her off with a sharp:

"You're in trouble with me already, Pet, don't make things worse."

Without another word Mindfang pulls the belt from her dressing gown. Rosa's stymied by it for a few moments, but then her arms are wrenched behind her and--

"Don't, please--" Her voice cracks and the will to fight floods out of her spine. "Mistress, don't--"

"You've made it abundantly clear that you can't be trusted, Pet." Mindfang snarls, tying her hands tightly behind her. "Is this how you've decided to repay my trust? By-- by-- mangling yourself?"

"It doesn't have anything to do with you!" She shouts, her voice quavering. "It really doesn't."

"It does when a woman under my care is wounding herself."

"I'm your possession, not your ward." Rosa snaps, doing her level best to sit back up. Mindfang shoves her back and plants a knee to her ribcage.

"You are mine, darling, and that's all that matters." Mindfang hisses, low and angry. "I adore you, Pet, and I won't have you... you... doing this to yourself. So no hands."

"Just beat me and get it over with." She hisses and Mindfang snarls back and it quickly becomes a battle of wills that Mindfang, of course, wins.

"Oh, no, darling, I don't think so." Mindfang says, a little bit too nicely. "I've tried being nice. I've tried being understanding. I've tried giving you your space. I've tried being overbearing and you're just determined to destroy yourself. So I'm in charge now--"

She starts to cry. She starts to cry very hard.

"It's not going to work." She grumbles, only checking to make sure that her wrists are tied securely behind her. They are. Rosa's already tried to get her hands free several times.

"I don't know how to handle this," She mutters as she crosses the room to grab a bottle of brandy and swigs straight from the bottle. "I just can't handle this. I am not drunk enough to handle this."

"Well you're sober and I want to be dead so I guess there's an easy way to fix this--"

"You stop being suicidal and I finish this bottle?"

"No, you get drunk then pass out and while you're unconscious I find the man I attempted to bludgeon to death this morning and provoke him into murdering me so both of us win-- I didn't kill
myself and you're drunk."

"Stop saying words before I gag you." She hisses loudly.

* * *

They sit on opposite sides of the room and glare at one another. It's not at all productive. But they keep doing it anyways. It's the single most tense situation she's been in and, somehow, it completely takes her mind off of her son--

Mindfang drinks. She drinks and glares and the longer they sit there, her eye begins to twitch. Slowly yet surely it twitches, starting with a flicker of her eyelid and spreading down to her cheek.

"Are we just going to sit here all night?" Rosa asks, sweetly, narrowing her eyes. "Because the second you fall asleep I'm going to rip your face off."

"Yes." Mindfang growls, her voice sounding quite honestly like that of an angry dog. "Yes we are."

Rosa can't figure out what her face is meant to be. So she attempts to school her face to look similar. They glower at each other for another half hour before Rosa huffs.

"Are you going to murder me or fuck me?" She snaps, finally, her teeth bared.

If Mindfang is shocked by her language, she doesn't say it. "Neither."

"So are we really going to do this all night, then?"

"Considering that every time I leave you alone you attempt to murder yourself, I'm just going to see how long it takes you to start masturbating and just enjoy the show."

The room goes absolutely silent. There's the noise of wood crackling in the fire and Mindfang gives her a smug stare as if she's won and Rosa is momentarily far too scandalized to say a word.

Masturbation. Masturbation? What-- What-- How could she even--

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," She hisses, her face flushing a virulent green.

Mindfang stares at her. She stares at her and her face begins to twitch even more. "You have got to be kidding me." she groans, rubbing at her eyes and letting out a murderous sound.

"No. No, I'm not" She snaps, wishing she could hide under the blankets and cover her face because she cannot believe she's having this conversation-- they're going to be murdered--

"No member of proper society would ever even consider--"

Mindfang cuts her off with a frustrated noise. She can't tell if it's murder or rage or what have you but she sounds utterly displeased. "What-- What is your deal now!"

"You're singlehandedly contributing to the extinction of our species," Rosa hisses, wondering if this is true or, in fact, she'd just been told that as a member of the Sisterhood so none of them would... indulge themselves. To put it politely.

Mindfang throws her bottle to the floor and it shatters. "OH MY GOD. OVERREACTION." She shouts, standing quickly and letting out a scream of rage. "CAN YOU JUST CALM DOWN ABOUT EVERYTHING FOR TEN MINUTES!"
Rosa hisses like a horrified snake, blushing even worse. "NO, NO I WON'T CALM DOWN."

"WELL YOU COULD HELP BY JUST HAVING SEX WITH ME." Mindfang screams, looming over her. Rosa snarls back at her

"NO, NO-- WE'RE NOT--YOU'RE TERRIBLE!" Rosa fires back. It's not in any way eloquent but at least they're not fighting over suicide anymore? No. It's not better. They're fighting over society's worst taboo--

"I JUST CAN'T WIN WITH YOU, CAN I!?" Mindfang shoves her, hard and she goes flying across the bed. Immediately she's struggling to sit back up, hissing and spitting and trying to free her hands so she can scratch her stupid eyes out--

"HAVE YOU-- I MEAN-- FOR THE LOVE OF ALL THINGS HOLY, ROSA-- ARE YOU EVEN A LIVING BEING--" Mindfang's getting increasingly more agitated. Rosa doesn't let it phase her. "IS THE REASON YOU DON'T WANT TO HAVE SEX WITH ME IS THAT YOU DON'T WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR SPECIES?"

"YES."

"WELL THAT'S STUPID AND I THINK YOU'RE STUPID AND THIS ARGUMENT IS STUPID--"

"THIS ARGUMENT IS INCREDIBLY PERTINENT TO THE PROBLEMS PRESENTED IN THE CONTINUATION OF OUR SPECIES BECAUSE IF EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US ALLOWED OUR CARNAL DESIRES TO OVERTAKE US, WHERE THE HELL WOULD WE BE!"

"A WHOLE HELL OF A LOT LESS HORNY, FOR ONE THING--"

Okay. That hits close to home. That hits very close to home. She takes a sharp breath and narrows her eyes. "I CANNOT BELIEVE YOU--"

"DAMNIT ROSA JUST STICK YOUR HAND UP YOUR SKIRT AND DO WHAT THE REST OF US DO EVERY DAY."

"WHAT-- I CAN'T-- WHAT IS WRONG--" Rosa tries to slap her away. It’s not very effective; Her hands are, of course, still very tightly tied behind her and all she can do is shove her shoulders in her general direction.

Mindfang looks absolutely dishevelled and more than a little manic as she tries to pin her down. It shouldn’t be hard but, well, Mindfang seems more than a little flustered. "FOR THE LOVE OF FUCK-- LET ME HELP. NO, NO I INSIST, LET ME HELP."

At the feel of one of her hands clumsily pressing against her inner thigh, Rosa lets out a horrific scream. Mindfang’s hand retreats like someone burned it. "I AM GOING TO BITE YOUR FACE OFF."

"YEAH WELL I WANT TO KISS YOUR FACE OFF, RIP OFF ALL OF YOUR CLOTHES AND MAKE YOU STOP ACTING LIKE A PRISSY BITCH FOR ONCE." Mindfang insists, passionately.

"I WARNED YOU," Rosa growls and then, before Mindfang has a chance to realize what in the world she's referring to. Without further ado she throws herself against Mindfang as best as she can and sinks her teeth deep into her neck. Mindfang makes a choked noise of absolute something--
"Oh fuck me," She gasps out and then lets out a horribly arousing moan.

Rosa releases her jaw as if Mindfang’s skin is covered in mild acid instead of a sheen of sweat and a layer of perfume.

"...We really need to have sex." Rosa admits with a groan, closing her eyes as if that fact will help her avoid the truth of it. “We really need to have sex.”

"This wouldn't be happening if you weren't trying to kill yourself." Mindfang mutters, huffily, extracting a handkerchief from her bosom and using it to staunch the flow of blood from her neck.

Rosa wants to deny this. But as she opens her mouth to protest this she only starts to cry. Cry hard. Mindfang gives her a look of utter horror, eyes wide and jaw slack. She moves her mouth like she's going to say words but nothing comes out so Rosa just keeps crying, harder and harder.

"I'm sorry," She keens, wiping at her eyes furiously. "I'm so sorry--"

"What for?" Mindfang asks, groaning. "Rosa, you're not doing anything wrong--"

"I don't know how to make you happy," She hiccups, loudly, and it sounds stupid even as she says it. "And you're trying so hard to make me happy--"

"You make me happy, you silly little-- you-- you ridiculous creature-- I mean-- seriously, you need to get laid I think the endorphins would do you a world of good--"

"I'm not good for anything," Rosa mutters, with self-pity that makes her loathe herself.

"What in the world is wrong with you, you silly woman." Mindfang grumbles, pulling her close.

"Do I have to be much more obvious about how I feel about you? Do I really have to? Because I don't really feel comfortable with that--"

"Everyone who's ever cared for me is dead. I don't think you should really take the risk--"

"I'm in love with you, fate and consequences be damned. What's going to happen, huh? Dragons flying down from blood red skies to eat my extremities off one by one and then pluck out my eyeballs? And then get stabbed through the back?"

"No--" Rosa starts to say.

"You'll turn into a rabid monster and bite my head off? We'll all get murdered horribly? A cycle of bitter hatred will begin that lasts for centuries? Hundreds of years from now our ancestors will still be working out the passive aggressive heartbreak from our torrid affair?"

She's getting more ridiculous the longer Rosa allows her to talk. But it's nice to hear all the same, because, well, putting it into perspective does make things seem more than a little silly. Mindfang drapes an arm over her shoulders and hugs her close.

"So let me love you. Let me love you to bits and scraggly pieces because who gives a fuck about what happens if we're just happy for a few blissful days. Unless, of course, you think we're going to be eaten by grumpy mermaids or something. Perhaps we can play a few rounds of cards with the creator of the universe? Maybe he'll make us a cup of tea before damning us to death."

"We can always escape while he's busy rolling the dice." Rosa snuffles, rubbing her face on Mindfang’s shoulder because she has no hands to do so. "I want you to kiss me now."
She does. She kisses her very nicely, in fact, without any teeth or biting or grumbles of temper.

"...I think we need a vacation." Mindfang mutters, huffing. Rosa nods in agreement and Mindfang’s forced to dive out of the way to avoid losing an eye to her reckless horns. "Really really need a vacation."

"I've never been on one." Rosa whispers, shyly, trying to pretend that she doesn't really quite like that suggestion even though it sounds lovely-- "Where would we go?"

Mindfang kisses her forehead and pulls her close, her elbows pinned awkwardly behind her. "I'll surprise you. Now, I think we need to go to bed."

"Yes. Yes that sounds nice." Rosa agrees, allowing her face to be wiped clean with the same handkerchief that's covered in Mindfang's brilliant blue blood. "Very nice."

"It will be."

"Can I have my hands back, please?"

"Are you going to use them to masturbate?"

"NO."

"Then no, no you can't have them back." Mindfang mutters, slipping off of the bed. "Go to sleep. We'll-- we'll feel better in the morning."

“Probably feel even better if we just had sex.”

“I am going to kill you in your sleep.” Mindfang hisses, throwing a pillow at her head. Rosa ducks but the pillow still snags on her horn and rips a huge gash, so that Rosa's covered in feathers and utterly perplexed.

She shakes it off as best as she can and braves a smile. "I think that’s called necrophilia. I’m not an expert, mind you—“

Mindfang growls but it’s playful this time. They both fall silent for a few minutes until, suddenly, Mindfang sits up and whispers: “Wait did you threaten to bite my face off?!?"

“In my defense, that’s the third time today I used that threat. I don’t know how in the world I’d achieve that goal, mind you--”

“Fuck am I in love with you.”

"...I miss my baby." Rosa whispers as Mindfang covers her up with all of their blankets, so many blankets she feels like she's going to suffocate.

"I know. I know."
Chapter Summary

Mindfang and Rosa go on vacation while the ship is dry docked for repairs and Mindfang attempts to avoid the authorities.

Chapter Notes

So this took a lot longer than expected to get out... but it's also almost 80 pages so I think you might forgive me? I hope. I love you all. I really wanted to take my time with this to make sure I got the dynamics between them right and that I wasn't making up a terrible scenario. Thanks to everyone who helped me edit this along the way-- you kick ass.

This is probably going to be one of the last happy chapters for a while so, uh, enjoy it while it lasts.

ALSO FANART.
http://queenvriskan.tumblr.com/post/53573664555/my-my-arent-we-gorgeous-deep-waters
http://cultivationartisan.tumblr.com/post/53543326221/another-deep-waters-strange-bedfellows-fanart
http://saintdolofang.tumblr.com/post/53255350341/i-dont-think-im-going-to-have-you-stay-with
http://adderallpizza.tumblr.com/post/53498635712/youre-singlehandedly-contributing-to-the
http://sablesheep.tumblr.com/post/55783199281/this-wasnt-on-the-internet-and-it-really-needed

If it's okay with you guys, I'd love to add the stuff that takes place in a chapter to that chapter... but if that's not okay that's okay? Let me know.

ALSO Deep Waters has a tumblr tag now; if you want to see the fanart and my update rants or any other wonderful things, check out the 'bedfellowblogging'. As always, feel free to drop me a line here or over at tumblr with questions.

For the entirety of the last leg of their journey, Rosa is kept on suicide watch. Or at least-- she thinks it's a suicide watch. No one leaves her alone and they don't allow her to have sharp objects so that's what it must be. She would like to remind both Mindfang and Marcus that she didn't attempt to slit her wrists, she attempted to rip her veins out using her fingernails... but she hasn't been allowed the free use of her hands the entire time so that doesn't seem like it will work in her favor.
At least Marcus is willing to let her knit when he shows up; he sits in the armchair across from her little nest on the couch and, as long as her hands remain occupied with the yarn, he'll allow her to remain unbound. He'll also talk to her which really is quite pleasant-- especially considering how Mindfang is with her.

She sits there, in the same chair Marcus usually does, and glowers. She drinks her tea, sits there with her journal and glowers at Rosa, her gaze absolutely unwavering when she decides to pay her attention. And, of course, she refuses to untie her hands. It's not pleasant whatsoever.

They haven't really spoken since their terse truce was formed; it's been five days and-- well-- Rosa knows they're going to dock. Part of her knows that she'll be better off being the bigger woman but... well... she doesn't want to be.

So when she wakes up early one morning to Mindfang still unconscious beside her, she seizes her chance. The silk binding her wrists has absolutely no give to it and it's a difficult process but she manages.

Her hands now free, but aching, Rosa lets out a long, low sigh. Part of her knows the heart of Mindfang's behavior was good-- a perversion of kindness, if you will. She saw a problem, saw that Rosa herself was failing to address it, and gave it a temporary solution. A bandage to be removed once a proper doctor has examined the wound. But she doubts there's a doctor in the world that can salve this kind of hurt, so she does what she can.

It takes only five minutes for Rosa to remember how to tie a noose. It's radically more difficult to do so on a sleeping victim who has this much hair, but she manages. She ties it around Mindfang's neck, nowhere near tightly enough to choke but enough that it makes the message clear.

She isn't quite sure what the message is. A warning, she thinks, but not a very good one. Or a very clever one.

Then she slips out onto the deck, into the sunshine pouring down. The air is heavy with humidity and the odor of seaweed; the day is warm, not quite hot but enough that she's able, at the least, to remain comfortable in nothing more than her trusted long-sleeved black dress.

She crosses the deck to the wheel house, where a sailor she doesn't know is manning the ship. "Good morning," She murmurs, bowing her head. He salutes her in reply, apparently knowing enough to recognize her.

Marcus is nowhere to be found on deck and she frowns before deciding that, perhaps, he's in the map room. When she knocks he answers with a gruff 'come in!'.

She cracks the door just enough that she can slip inside. Marcus is draped across a hammock with a rough blanket pulled up to his chest. He looks utterly disoriented by her appearance and makes a soft trill of acknowledgement at the sight of her.

Rosa wordlessly scrambles into the hammock beside him. It's taking a liberty, of course, but he spent last evening soothing her in a way that was liberal enough to convince her she's not misinterpreting his advances.

"I don't want to disturb you--" She starts to say but Marcus shushes her by rubbing the base of her skull until she mumbles awkwardly and falls silent. "I just--"

Marcus hushes her once more. "Sleep, Rosa, or go back to the Captain."

She makes a quick decision and falls asleep. Sleep lasts about twenty-four minutes before the door
crashes open with an unhinging bang. Mindfang is looming in the doorway, noose still around her neck and very much ready to kill.

Marcus opens one eye and glares at her. "Captain. I'm not on watch."

"I am going to throw you into my armoire and lock you in." Mindfang growls, stomping across the room with eyes wide and angry and her hair flourishing out around her head.

Marcus sits up, quickly, and lets out a gruff roar. Rosa hides her face against his chest, inhaling the comforting smell of saltwater and shaving soap. "Vienna. Stop it."

"SHE TIED A NOOSE AROUND MY NECK." Mindfang snarls, lunging for her. Rosa uses Marcus as a very effective shield-- Mindfang stops in her tracks, clearly more concerned about breaking his face in than her own. He gives, Mindfang a seriously disappointed look, face hardened into a mask that clearly states 'this is upsetting behavior'. When Mindfang makes a move to shove him aside, he reaches forward and holds her back. Rosa's surprised that Mindfang doesn't immediately slap his hand aside but, instead, chooses to respect the gesture.

They stare at each other, Captain and First Mate, a clear battle of wills flickering between them. It's an odd juxtaposition of gender, stature, hair color, nobility-- all of those things that society likes to define its members by. But they're matched perfectly all the same.

Eventually Mindfang huffs, and turns her furious gaze on Rosa. "What the hell do you think you're going accomplish by treating me like this?"

"You started it." Rosa mutters, sulkily. "I'm intelligent enough to take care of myself--" "Clearly not." Mindfang hisses. Rosa's skin crawls from the base of her spine up to her neck as she meets Mindfang's eyes. Dear heavens would she like to punch her in the face right about now.

"Go die." She growls. Mindfang just growls back, a wordless sound. That's when Rosa's temper-- kept on a very tight leash for far too long-- decides it's had enough of being well behaved and makes a break for it. She tries to go for Mindfang's neck, mostly because she's still wearing the hastily knotted noose and that seems like an easy way to win this fight, but her feet get tangled in the netting of Marcus's hammock and she catapults to the floor of the map room. Mindfang is quick to retrieve her-- by her hair-- and they're both even more quick to attack one another.

That is, they're quick to try attacking; Marcus is bigger than both of them and, while Rosa's assured Mindfang might be matched for strength, she doesn't attempt to fight him off when he yanks them apart.

"Annie--" He says, gesturing at Mindfang. "Annie--" He repeats gesturing at Rosa.

In awkward unison, they both say "Don't call me that!" with equal vehemence; Rosa's with more of an embarrassed, horrified inflection and Mindfang with more of a homicidal one.

"Girls." He amends, to their equal displeasure. "I'm incredibly pale for you both. You're both wonderful. But I gotta put my foot down--" He glares at them both. "I'm not ashen for either of you. In any way. So. You know what? You two just gotta fuck and get it over with."

Rosa gasps, horrified, and attempts to look away, pointedly, but instead goes bright green and stares at the floor. Mindfang snorts, dismissively and Rosa can feel her eyes boring a hold in the crown of her head.
"That would require her being able to go more than five minutes without crying." She grumbles with a melodramatic snort thrown in for good measure.

Rosa's head shoots up and she snarls, the sound more feral than any she's made in months. It's the kind of noise that makes wolves crawl back into bed for the night and convinces most troll predators that, perhaps, she isn't one to be messed with. Marcus looks suitably disarmed but Mindfang's haughty sneer remains unwavering. "You're the one who told me to take my time!"

"Doesn't mean I like it!" Mindfang shouts back, throwing her hands into the air like she's jumped off a cliff into the ocean below and is hurtling into the ocean below while she screams. "I want to fuck your brains out!"

"I'M NOT SURE IF I'M READY FOR THAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP."
Rosa hisses, wishing that Marcus wasn't standing a few feet away looking politely disinterested.

Mindfang groans, gesturing awkwardly at her, as if to say 'yes, you, I am talking to you!'. "I know! And that's why I'm not asking you to have sex with me! But I really really want to--"

"Are you pressuring her into having sex with you?" Marcus asks, interrupting with a hiss and a flash of his eyeteeth. "Because I won’t have any of that going on aboard this ship."

"She hasn't--" Rosa tries to say, immediately coming to Mindfang's defense. Marcus and Mindfang both ignore her.

Mindfang looks like she's been slapped, and possibly told that her intelligence is on par with that of a particularly daft rabbit. It's a mixture of shock and fury that, somehow, makes Rosa's hackles lower a little. Poor dear. Doesn't even realize how stupid she seems sometimes. "Do you honestly think I'd take advantage of her, Marcus? After all we've been through--"

"If she doesn't want to have sex with you--" Marcus tries to defend her honor, but Mindfang is having none of it.

"YOU SUGGESTED IT."

"Does it even count as sex when our parts aren't interlocking?" Rosa asks, absently, in an attempt to distract them from the debate because even she can tell that it's not going to go anywhere.

They both fall silent in the space of a moment to stare at her. Mindfang looks suddenly exhausted, reaching up and loosening the noose around her neck. Marcus looks absolutely incredulous.

"...Does it count as sex then? I don't really know. I'm more familiar with breeding rather than intercourse." She repeats, feeling like she might know the answer but preferring to maintain a face of polite curiosity.

"I take it back. You can't have sex with her." Marcus says, slowly, patting Mindfang on the shoulder and giving her a pitying stare. He leans in and whispers to Mindfang, in a voice that's not at all quiet, "I'm, uh, I'm thinking you might just wanna buy a vibrator."

"Already have one." Mindfang mutters, unamused and still glowering at Rosa as if this is somehow all her fault.

Marcus huffs. "Get one for her and give it a year."

"Hey." Rosa says, offended. "I read!"
This does not work in her defense whatsoever. Mindfang makes an angry kitten noise and rubs at her eyes. Marcus seizes the chance to rather gracefully exit the room, in nothing but his breeches and a wool blanket worn as a cloak.

Mindfang courteously waits for him to leave before speaking. She looks at Rosa like she hasn’t slept in weeks, her face worn down by stress and showing the result of weeks of nervous tension. "I can't do this-- I just-- I can't."

"I'm not doing it on purpose." Rosa mumbles, staring at the floor and feeling tears inexplicably burn the backs of her eyes. This is, quite possibly, one of the most shaming experiences of her life. "I-- I'm attracted to you more than anyone I've ever met--"

"That's not saying anything."

"Don't belittle me." Rosa sniffs, rubbing at her face again. She wants to be back in bed, back in bed with her hands trapped behind her and glowering holes into Mindfang's skull. "I-- I really-- I want to. I'm just... I'm scared."

Mindfang makes another noise that's part angry and part sad. "Rosa, Pet, I won't make you do anything you don't want to--"

"I know. I know." Rosa cuts her off before she can gain steam. "I know you won't. You respect me enough, I think."

"You think." Mindfang grumbles, coloring in a way that seems to indicate sadness instead of shame.

"You threatened to lock me in armoire." Rosa reminds her, taking Mindfang’s fingers and pressing her own against them, tip by tip by tip. "I-- I'm not scared you'll hurt me. Or that... you'll... I don't even know-- I'm just--"

Words go and go and go from her mouth in a ridiculous flood of syllables. Mindfang lets her talk, though, her lips quirking up just a little at the edges.

"--I mean. I just. I need-- I mean-- I like how things are and what if I don't make you happy-- what if- - what if I don't like it-- What if--"

"For the love of fuck, Rosa, it's sex. It's wonderful and it's passionate and it's a really great thing in general. I don't really know what I can tell you. I'm not giving you a step by step guide." She shrugs and laces her fingers through Rosa's own. "Darling girl. I'm not going to use you to get off and then throw you overboard."

"...I don't like that image, Mistress."

Mindfang slaps her cheek, lightly. "Cheeky minx. What good would it do me to break you in and then get rid of you? That's three months of work down the drain--"

Rosa shoves her into the wall before she can finish that train of thought and derail any affection they've begun to foster. "Stop being a big bad pirate and tell me-- honestly-- why do you want to have sex with me?"

"Because I can't stop trying to imagine what your face is going to look like the first time I show you just how much I'm in love with you and just how much I want you."

Mindfang shoves her arm away and kisses her, hard. Rosa kisses her back, pretending that she's completely at ease with that sentiment. She's not sure what to do with the knowledge that Mindfang's
in love with her and-- more importantly-- does she really want that. Or does she not want that? Customarily, a woman being in love with you-- a woman that you're also rather attracted to and have feelings of affection towards-- is viewed as a good thing--

But Mindfang pulls away before she can make up her mind, face going calculatedly blank as she looks at Rosa once more. She steps back and deftly unknots the noose around her neck until it's nothing but flat rope once more.

"You're not getting away with this, you know. I'm not letting this go, Rosa." She murmurs, absently twisting the rope around her hands. "I can't have you treating me like this. And I can't have you treating yourself like this."

Rosa shrugs, staring anxiously at the rope that Mindfang holds. It's going to go back around her wrists, isn't it? She's going to go back to being tied up on Mindfang's bed, seething with anger even while she anxiously awaits her return. When Mindfang gestures for her to put her wrists down she stares for a few seconds and shakes her head. Mindfang raises an eyebrow and coughs, delicately, then beckons again. Rosa crosses her arms over her chest, trapping her hands beneath her arms.

"Don't do this, Rosa," Mindfang grumbles, tiredly. "I don't want to have to do this."

"Then don't." Rosa snaps, skittering backwards when she advances. There's nowhere to go and she knows she's going to lose but-- it's better than not even trying. Mindfang is, of course, more than quick to pounce, wrestling her over the table and pinning her down by her neck. Her cheek slams into the wood with a crack and she hisses.

"Hands." Mindfang growls. "Don't make me ask again."

Rosa gives up and, ever so slowly-- as if making her wait is some sort of rebellion-- crosses them behind her back. Mindfang binds her hands, tightly, and-- for the first time in days-- doesn't check to make sure that her wounds are healing. She can't twist her wrists around fully and the pressure on her still tender arm is unbearable. She makes a noise of pain and Mindfang doesn't listen. It's rare and painful.

"Do you have to?" She asks, hopelessly. "I'm not going to do it again-- Don't be so--"

"I won't have you misbehaving." Mindfang whispers into her ear, yanking hard on the bonds-- ignoring her as she arches her back and writhes in pain, breath suddenly hitting her in painful bursts of oxygen as she fights to keep her eyes open through the pain. "Let me make one thing clear. I'll tolerate foolishness. I'll tolerate stupidity. Hell, I'll even tolerate you getting your pale-rom on with my First Mate but what I will not tolerate is insubordination."

And then, just as quickly as the lightning struck, the storm is rolling away, off to darker parts of Mindfang's mind. She releases some of the slack on her bonds.

"I have to have order on my ship. Constant order." Mindfang states, quietly, reaching forward and carefully tucking Rosa's hair behind her ear. Her fingertips linger on her jaw, just beneath her earlobes. Her touch sends an arch of energy down her spine; it's like she's forgotten an ice cube on her nightstand and then, in the middle of the night, reached over for the lamp and plunged her fingers into the half-melted ice. "And you do a wonderful enough job spoiling my carefully organized system without strangling me."

* * *

Mindfang, much to her surprise, does not attempt any sort of actual retribution for the death threat.
She shackles her to the bed, of course, but that's not *retribution* so much as saving face in front of Marcus's rather judgmental glares. And after a few days she wordlessly unies her arms and undoes the cuff around her ankle. There's no apology or explanation; just a pointed look. Rosa understands. She doesn't want to, but she does.

Mindfang is, at the least, taking *slightly* more effort to talk to her; she says words in her general direction more often, of course, and-- well--

There's usually a lot of people in their room lately. A lot of them. Mindfang leaves her on the bed but draws the curtains, leaving her unable to do anything more but listen and anxiously decipher. Rosa ignores them as best as she can but it's slightly disconcerting. Only slightly, however, as the implication seems to be-- for the most part-- that they're docking soon. And not docking for a few days to restock but *docking*-- for repairs and to 'lie low'.

Rosa doesn't like the sound of 'lying low' at all. Mindfang refuses to discuss the subject, telling her each time in the same calm, condescending voice, 'you'll know when you need to'.

This, apparently, means that Mindfang is going to do whatever she feels like without asking. Rosa's decidedly bewildered, therefore, when she wakes up early in the day to the sound of the ship docking, opens her eyes and sees that their *entire cabin* has been packed into trunks. Not the furniture, of course; that appears to be remaining with the ship, but all of Mindfang's journals are off the shelf, the dressers and armoires are open and empty and Rosa gives Mindfang a befuddled stare.

"Mistress?" She asks, slowly, slipping out of bed. Mindfang gives her a cursory glance, acknowledging her without paying any attention--

"Good, you're up. We're leaving in ten minutes." She mutters, rifling through one of the steamer trunks. "Put this on and get ready to go. Don't you *dare* start crying."

Rosa crosses the room in little, hesitant steps. Mindfang turns to her, a dress draped over her arm. She hands it over with a flick of her wrist, making the entire article of clothing shake under its own weight.

It's one of the fancier gowns Mindfang purchased for her, made from a beautiful black silk and trimmed with gold lace at the bust line and wrists. There's the faintest hint of floral embroidery along the hems in the same shining thread and it gleams in the sunlight streaming through the portholes. Mindfang drapes it over the back of the armchair before returning to the trunk that holds all of Rosa's clothes.

Soon enough she's dug out a matching slip and stockings as well as a set of stays and a pair of black velvet shoes. There's a lot of black lace and it's all lined with gloriously soft silk.

"I can't wear that," Rosa insists, backing towards the bed and wincing when she hits the backs of her knees on the bedframe. She falls down with an 'oof' of pain. Mindfang huffs and throws the dress at her

"Mistress, please, I can't-- It wouldn't be at all seemly." She begs, shaking her head and automatically reaching up to scratch her own arms. Mindfang sees it and her riding crop comes down, hard, on Rosa's thigh.

"Stop that." She mutters, scowling and brandishing the crop in her face like an unspoken threat. "I don't want to do this again, Pet."

"I can't wear that," Rosa insists, rubbing anxiously at her already-bruising thigh. Mindfang isn't
pulling her punches when it comes to this, apparently. Self-harm is not an acceptable behavior, which she already knew of course, but, well, it would appear that Mindfang's taking things a step further and attempting to hurt herself will only result in pain. Although, Rosa's not entirely sure if this is the best point to illustrate since-- well--

She's got a thing for that crop. And Mindfang's reasoning seems to be rather confused if she thinks pain will solve pain.

"Rosa."

Mindfang gives her a disparaging glare. Rosa belatedly realizes that Mindfang herself is wearing a rather lovely dress, sewn from a rich twilight blue linen. It's trimmed with royal blue ribbon and a sapphire pendant hangs just above her breasts. Her dress is fitted almost perfectly, tight to her breasts and absolutely snug against her waist before flaring out past her hips. Her hair is the only thing that's less than perfect, flaring out around her in a ridiculous mass of curls.

"Do as your told and put the dress on," Mindfang mutters, glaring. When Rosa fails to respond she growls in frustration and advances. She helps Rosa out of her robe and nightgown and in moments Rosa's naked and none too happy about it. Soon enough Rosa's being forced into the slip and Mindfang's lacing a corset up her back. She doesn't need it, of course; while her breasts could use the assistance, her waist requires little in the way of accent. But now doesn't seem the time to argue the point.

Mindfang spares her the indignity of suffering through having her stockings put on. But she does stand before her frowning and tapping her toes until Rosa does them up and fastens her garters. She works the dress over her head, artfully avoiding ripping it on her horns. The dress's waist sits just below her breasts and is modestly cut, revealing only the slightest swell of her breasts. The sleeves fall just midway down her forearm and she's forced to look at the lines of angry jade that crisscross her skin.

"Mistress, I can't allow this--" She attempts to say as Mindfang's fingers fly up the buttons along her back with nimble speed. "--It's hardly appropriate--"

"Do you want to get arrested for being a pirate or do you want to go to an art museum and look at paintings?"

"...Art museum." Rosa mumbles in a small voice, staring at her feet. It's not a hard choice to make but it still makes her feel as if she's sacrificed some principle to allow herself to be dressed up like a lady of rank and fashion instead of a nobly-born slave.

"Then shut the fuck up and get your shoes on." Mindfang growls, throwing her shawl at her before scooping up the last of their clothes and folding them into a trunk.

She pulls on a coat that Rosa's never seen before, a long one sewn from a sumptuous black velvet with an ornate sapphire brooch pinned to the collar. The buttons down the front are sapphire as well and Rosa arches an eyebrow because someone seems to be showing off.

It feels wrong to be doing this but, well, she knows when it's appropriate to do as told. If Mindfang wants her to look like a spoiled princess, she'll comply. She'll give her baleful glowers for the rest of the day, but she'll do it.

Mindfang pats her back, softly, and then nudges her towards the door. "Look, Pet, the ship needs standard repairs and, well, after the heist we just pulled... let's just say it's about time to lay low for a
couple of weeks." "Okay." Rosa mumbles, quietly, feeling herself start to shake. "I-- I trust you."
She earns herself a glowing smile with that remark. "Good girl. Now let's hit the road, shall we?"

* * *

They approach the carriage slowly, Mindfang's arm around her waist. Rosa can't quite tell if it's an attempt to keep her from running or an attempt to steady her.

Rosa's been in a carriage twice before-- the day she was taken down to the caverns and the day she was taken to Mindfang's ship. She's been in a car more often; in the battle between antiquity and technology, technology is one that she's more than familiar with-- for every hand-carved masterpiece like Mindfang's Widow there's a metallic monstrosity like the Orphaner's warship.

It doesn't quite surprise her that Mindfang has chosen a hoofbeast-drawn carriage instead of an automobile. She has a thing for antiquity unless technology is of absolute benefit to her; she has a hand-carved ship, but there's a walk-in fridge and indoor plumbing. The facts speak for themselves There's a team of four hoofbeasts, each one of them a beautiful, gleaming chestnut. Their breath rises into the chill of the morning air as they paw, anxiously, at the ground beneath their hooves.

Mindfang helps her into the carriage with a surprising show of chivalry. Rosa sits on the edge of her seat, nervously chewing at her lower lip. Oh dear-- she can't handle this. She truly, truly cannot handle this.

But Mindfang's already climbing up behind her, keeping up a long litany of instructions to Marcus. Rosa huddles up in the corner of the cabin, pulling her knees to her chest and hiding her face. She takes a slow breath and tries to settle herself, but it's not at all successful. Everything feels wrong.

Mindfang was the one to dress her this morning. She was the one who packed, who made arrangements for their trip and saw that her quarters were properly cleaned.

Mindfang settles her bag onto the seat cushion beside her and makes herself comfortable, nuzzling into the quilted wall and pulling a spare fur coat over her knees. Mindfang rummages through her satchel to produce Rosa's knitting. She's stuffed it into an old reticule that's absolutely perfect in size and, when she hands it over, Rosa murmurs her thanks in a voice that can barely stand under its own weight.

Mindfang's placed her pattern sketches in there along with her project, spare needles and a few extraneous balls of yarn. There's also a spare shawl and a book about early Adriatic art that she's hasn't seen before.

"Mistress--" She begins, but Mindfang's still digging around for something. Eventually she manages to produce a journal and pen and only then does she acknowledge Rosa.

Mindfang glances up at her and then smiles. "Do you need anything else, Pet?"

"I don't know." Rosa mumbles, staring at her lap.

She doesn't. Every time she left the caverns under some other creature's transport she was with the Sisters; she never rode in a car or carriage with her Son or his Disciples. And if there's one thing that the Sisters did not like it was idle time.

Rosa is, of course, being facetious. The only acceptable way to use time was to sit in silent contemplation, meditating on the meaning of the sermons from the Darkest Ring.

Mindfang takes her extended silence as a confirmation and raps on the partition between themselves
and the driver. The carriage takes off at a surprising pace; Rosa's startled and lets out a quiet trill of anxiety. Her Mistress gives her a concerned glance.

"What's wrong with you?"

"I-- I-- where are we going?"

Mindfang rolls her eyes and cracks open a novel in her lap. "I told you I'd take you to the Adratic, didn't I?"

“Yes, but I rather thought that was romantic banter.” Rosa replies, her voice shaky. “I’m—I’m nervous.”

“You’ll be fine,” Mindfang says, absently, clearly absorbed in her book. “Just relax.”

* * *

They travel almost all day before the sky finally breaks open. It had been threatening to storm all morning and still, neither Mindfang nor Rosa are prepared for it. Rosa's never been trapped out in a storm before; she's always been able to hide in caves or under the covers. Being outside in the carriage is a completely different experience. Mindfang appears absolutely non-plussed by it, not even glancing up from her journal. It takes Rosa quite some time to work up the courage to crack open her lips.

"Mistress," She whispers, voice going up an octave with fear. She wants to cry. She wants to cry and rave and scream and holler-- she wants to tell

"Not now, Pet," Mindfang murmurs, absently, making a sharp notation into her journal. Rosa flinches and curls her arms around herself with a frown. The fur isn't keeping her warm anymore or-- at the least-- .

A bolt of lightning sends white light flashing from behind the curtains and thunder cracks like a whip and she cries out without meaning to.

Mindfang glances up from her journal and stares at her. "Pet?" She asks, raising her eyebrows. "What's wrong?"

"When are we going to get home?" She asks her in a tiny voice. "I don't like this."

"Rosa--"

Thunder shakes the carriage and Rosa lets out a scream. Mindfang sighs and reaches up to pinch the bridge of her nose. Rain is beginning to make the cabin icy cold and Rosa hates it.

"We'll see if it lets up." Mindfang promises her with a sigh. "Give it ten minutes."

* * *

Within those ten minutes the road becomes impassible, the horses struggling to slog along. Rosa's all but in tears; she's sure they're going to tip over and die, horribly, out in the rain. That doesn't happen, of course, but the carriage does eventually refuse to move forward any further.

They end up walking the rest of the way to the nearest inn, with the driver promising that he'll get help at a nearby farm. Mindfang, of course, ignores Rosa's meek request that they wait in the carriage.
They're soaked in minutes. It's highly unpleasant and very muddy. Rosa's utterly exhausted by the
time they're struggling up to the front desk of the only inn in town. She can't stop crying to save her
life and Mindfang's clearly more than a little frustrated by it. Her face is tense beneath her rainlogged
hair and Rosa's sure she's seconds away from being slapped-- hard.

"We need a room," She snaps, rather meanly, to the man working the front desk. He gives her a
nervous smile and begins the process of registering them with shaky hands.

Rosa still can't compose herself. Mindfang lets out a frustrated noise. It's utterly out of character for
her to have such little patience-- well, at the sight of her crying, at least-- and Rosa chalks it up to the
fact that they're both exhausted.

"Is... is everything quite alright?" He asks, nervously, glancing between them. His grip tightens on
the keys he was just about to hand to her Mistress.

"Fine." Mindfang snarls, rubbing at the bridge of her nose with her index finger and thumb. "We're
fine."

He scoffs a little, quickly transmuting it into a cough when Mindfang growls at him. "I'm sorry,
ma'am, but the lady is clearly distressed and if that's the case, we'll have to call the authorities--"

"Her Moirail died earlier this afternoon. We're on our way to make arrangements for his estate. It's
been a very difficult trip and I would appreciate your understanding," Mindfang says through gritted
teeth, the lie slipping out of her mouth as easily as snow falling to the ground.

He immediately reaches for Rosa's hand, a look of absolute pity spreading across his face. It makes
her cry even harder because *damnit* Mindfang's upset an unwitting victim--

"I'm so sorry for your loss, Miss," He murmurs, frowning at the fact that his words are only having
the effect of making her cry harder, if anything. "If there's anything I can do to make your stay with
us at all more... cathartic, please do let me know."

Mindfang gives him a smile that's somehow friendly and horribly sad at the same time. Rosa's never
seen Mindfang look this sad before, even the few moments of weakness she's allowed herself to
have.

"Thank you. We appreciate it, we really do."

He gives Mindfang a comforting look and pats her on the shoulder. "You're a good Matesprit for
looking after her like this."

"She's not my Matesprit." Rosa breathes, her voice dead and defeated. "We're not Matesprits."

He immediately stiffens and looks suspiciously at Mindfang, eyes narrowed. The friendly demeanor
of his posture all but dissolves, like a piece of paper dipped in acid.

"I suppose you're right, darling," Mindfang says, wrapping an arm around her shoulder and
squeezing her tightly. "We were meant to have the ceremony next weekend. I don't think it's going to
happen now."

Mindfang's a good actress. An impressively good actress. As she speaks her face crumples in on
itself and she bites her lip. Almost immediately tears are rising into her eyes. She makes an
impressive show of attempting to hold them back, biting at her lip and staring at the ceiling, then
fanning at her face as if she's struggling to remain calm.
Rosa hates her more than she ever has in that moment. It's an acidic, platonic hatred that makes her gag. Mindfang immediately begins to soothe her with a painful awkwardness, an awkwardness that Rosa knows isn't her natural self at all.

"Shh, shh, dear--"

To make a twenty minute conversation short, they get the best room in the house. He attempts to give them the night free of charge but Rosa insists that Mindfang pay. She does, of course-- more than he asked.

They're shown up to their room with a graciousness that befits guests who just paid double the nightly rate and are (masquerading as) a grieving couple. Mindfang's quick to request a room for their carriage driver and is granted one in seconds. He brings one of the trunks up, the smaller one that Rosa remembers Mindfang telling her to pack for contingencies.

Once Mindfang's been prodded into tipping the hapless troll who'd driven them so stalwartly through the storm, they turn on each other-- or at least Mindfang turns to face her and, upon being confronted with a panicked Rosa, she grips her chin and forces her to meet her eyes. It does nothing to steady her.

Rosa still can't quite control her emotions; it's pathetic and makes her want to repeatedly slam her face into the nearest wall. Fear is fossilizing her bones as surely as the passage of time one day will.

"Pet," Mindfang says, in a voice that’s low and intended to soothe but still sounds as angry as an oncoming train. "Pet, you need to calm down."

She shakes her head and lets out a pained gasp, attempting to indicate that calming down isn't an option for her right now.

"I'll see about getting us tea," Mindfang mutters when it becomes clear that Rosa's too busy shaking and crying to do much of anything. She carries her over to the bed without asking if Rosa can walk herself there. Mindfang wraps her up in one of the many furs she dragged along with them and Rosa submits to the attention.

It only takes fifteen minutes for Mindfang to return with what seems to be a substitute for dinner at this time of the night; a pot of tea, half of a chocolate cake and some sandwiches.

Mindfang sinks onto the edge of the bed, a few feet away from her. She's still a nervous wreck, crying and shaking like a frightened bird.

Eventually Mindfang pours her a cup of tea and forces it into her hands. She doesn't say a word and they sit there in silence that's even more awkward still.

"Pet, can you just... just... calm the fuck down?"

Mindfang pinches the bridge of her nose and takes a deep, slow breath. She does it again and again until she's no longer shaking with suppressed rage. She's still upset, that much is obvious by the clamping of her jaw and how tightly the tendons in her hands bulge as she clings to her teacup.

"I'm scared." Rosa manages to hiccup, setting her teacup on the bedside table and ignoring the fact that it sloshes tea all over the wood. "I'm so scared."

"Rosa, Pet, if you can't handle a carriage ride--"

"I didn't get to say goodbye to Marcus, I'm tired, I'm cold, I'm frightened, I don't know where you're
taking me and *I don't want you to leave me.*" The words rush out of her mouth like a waterfall of anxiety crashing deep into a river of trauma and anxiety miles below, the twin natural forces whipping a blinding mist across her consciousness.

Her hands are shaking with the horrible certainty that Mindfang is not going to keep her; that the other night-- the night she ended up screaming at her, hands tied behind her back, was the last straw. This is it. Mindfang's taking her someplace far, far away to abandon her, to a place where she can sell her deep underground and never see her again--

"...Rosa?" Mindfang asks, incredulously. "Rosa, the *fuck* is wrong with you?"

"I'm scared--"

"Okay, okay, okay-- FIRST of all, first of all-- we're seeing Marcus in like ten days when he gets back from visiting his Kismesis over in Athens so you can kiss and make up with him then."

This is news. This is news because Rosa had no idea he had a Kismesis, or that she'd ever see him again-- the realization that he's *coming back* sends her into a fresh wave of tears, this time relieved ones.

Mindfang shushes her as best as she can by laying her fingers against her lips and trying, unconvincingly, to smile. "Second, there's a bed right over there and we've got dry clothes for you in our trunks-- and-- *damnit* Rosa why the fuck would I drag you to troll Italy just to *abandon you.*"

She becomes angrier as she speaks, making violent hand gestures and accented her words with sharp syllabance of 's' sounds.

Rosa allows herself to be pinned to the wall, not even bothering to struggle. Mindfang isn't at all pleased with this sort of reaction; she gives Rosa the equivalent of a death glare and reveals her fangs. "Well you said it wasn't to have sex with me so I don't see why else--"

"*Of course it's to have sex with you.* But you can't *say* that. Would you be reacting any better if I had told you, 'let's go to Italy for a romantic getaway so maybe you'll calm your fucking tits and have sex with me'!?, DOES THAT MAKE IT BETTER"

Rosa stares at her, mouth open. Well. There's something to be said for honesty, isn't there? Except, perhaps, this is a little more than *honesty* this is total bluntness. But, well, that's just how Mindfang is--

"Yes, actually, it makes me feel much better." Because it wouldn't be like Mindfang *at all* just to take her on a cute little trip to the countryside and not have an ulterior motive. Unless the ulterior motive was something sinister like sell her back into slavery.

"WELL THAT'S IT THEN." Mindfang shouts, showing her the full brunt of her teeth. "So *stop crying*. Please, *please* stop crying, Rosa."

That's-- well-- a plea. So Rosa nods, swallows, nods again and throws herself into Mindfang's arms. Mindfang holds her, holds her tight and rocks her back and forth.

"Why would I get rid of you now, silly?" Mindfang mutters, kissing her horns up and down from the base to the tip. It's an exhilarating feeling but doesn't quite soothe her.

"I don't know." Rosa mumbles, nuzzling closer into the skirt of her dress. "I-- I'm stupid, I guess."

"You're not stupid. You just don't understand the power of sex." Mindfang grumbles, rolling her
eyes.

Rosa laughs a little but still sniffs. "We're not having sex."

"Yeah, but the power here is that I really want to do that." Mindfang says, tickling the back of her neck until she sits up straight and squirms across the mattress on her back. "And I think once we do have sex I'm going to want to do it more so--"

"Mmm so what you're telling me is that if I don't live up to your expectations in bed you're going to leave me in a ditch?"

"Relax, Rosa," Mindfang mutters, laughing a little as she forces Rosa to stand with gentle nudges to her back. "I'm pretty sure I got a two year warranty."

Rosa catches Mindfang's eye in the mirror. She's giving her a smirk that would melt butter in her mouth and clearly hoping she won't be told to sleep on the floor. Her first instinct is, of course, to bawl once more. But Mindfang's giggling at her, just a little and it's clearly her idea of teasing so Rosa swallows her fear and flash of temper.

"Good. You're going to need it." Rosa snarls, showing her fangs. Mindfang makes a sound like a depressed puppy and curls around her, arms dropping around her hips and teeth fastening around her collarbone.

"Darling girl." Mindfang breathed, grinning wickedly. "Don't you love me?"

"Mmmmm." Rosa makes a noncommittal noise as Mindfang nudges her towards the ensuite bathroom. Mindfang keeps nudging her closer and closer and closer until they're stumbling over the threshold.

"Let's get in the bath, sweetheart." Mindfang purrs. "And I'll see if I can cheer you up a little."

She starts filling the bath, stuffing in the plug with her boot heel and starting the faucet with her boot toes. The water comes out steaming almost right away.

Rosa, for once, doesn't say a word in protest when Mindfang starts to shove her out of her clothes. She does, however, take over for her, slapping Mindfang's hands aside. Mindfang kisses her cheek and vanishes to the bedroom for a few seconds, only to return with the tea tray. She sets it next to the bathtub.

Rosa's already undressed and stepping into the water when she finally processes the fact that Mindfang is, in fact, intending on getting in with her. The bath is already up to her knees and she's looking forward to the water so there won't be any backing out.

So she remains standing, self-consciously adverting her eyes as Mindfang's dress piles onto the floor, quickly followed by her slip and corset. She wants to look. She wants to swallow her nervousness and shame and look at her-- look at every inch of her. Why should she be ashamed of wanting to see her? She doesn't know. But it feels wrong even when she knows Mindfang doesn't mind and is more than happy to be admired.

Rosa knows Mindfang's staring at her, eyes moving over her skin like prodding fingertips. She can feel her gaze linger on the protuberances of her ribs, the angry green of her scars, the slim curve of her breasts--

"You gorgeous, gorgeous girl," Mindfang whispers into her ear as she steps into the water behind her and curls her arms around her. It takes some awkward fidgeting but they eventually settle into the
water, Rosa settling between Mindfang's legs. She makes an absolutely glorious pillow, her breasts perfect padding against the boniness of her spine.

Mindfang curls her arms around her waist and keeps kissing up and down her shoulder. Her hair is floating around them, just the last few inches of her curls dampened.

"Kiss my neck." Rosa murmurs to her. To her surprise, Mindfang does. She kisses her neck, she bites her, she nuzzles her. But she keeps her hands where they are, respectfully curled around her ribcage. It's clear that she doesn't want to test her luck which is, well, abjectly shocking.

Rosa sighs and relaxes against her. The water is warm is exactly what she needed to calm her shaky nerves-- or, perhaps, Mindfang clinging to her like a constant reminder of who she belongs to. Still, that's hard to remember when Mindfang covers her in expensive soap that smells like lavender and lemon, whipping up a froth of bubbles that make the water gleam with an iridescent sheen.

Mindfang only scrubs her chest and arms; she avoids going close to anything that Rosa would deem objectionable. It's not a particularly thorough cleaning by any means. The water's enough to wash off the sweat and ease the pain out of her muscles and she doesn't feel like much more is warranted to make her any more pristine.

She curls into her. It feels good to be touched, to be warm and comfortable against Mindfang. It's dark in the bathroom, with the lights off and nothing but the light streaming in from the bedroom makes the place just bright enough to be cozy.

They fit together nicely, she muses, closing her eyes and basking in the heat without needing to worry that a sailor will burst through the door and spy her naked at any second. Rosa knows that, in all honestly, she should be quite horrified with herself; she's naked with another naked woman in a bathtub and didn't she swear herself to a life of chastity in honor of the Empire? She's not even supposed to be seen unveiled for goodness sake.

But Mindfang is warm against her back, a constant reminder that Rosa is wanted exactly where she is. She's a firm, fleshy pillow, albeit a pillow that really could stand to wash her hair. Oh dear that's not at all romantic--

Let's rephrase that. Mindfang's a beautiful, very naked woman with hair past her waist, horns with perfect gradient, eyes as brilliantly blue as the sea at sunset and a voice like velvet that's been left in a tide pool.

Rosa slips deeper under the water until her chin is submerged. She rests her head against Mindfang's ribcage and listens to the steady, slow pounding of her heart. Mindfang's chin fits perfectly in the cradle of her horns and the only drawback to this position is that Mindfang can no longer kiss her which is, of course, rather disheartening. She'll survive, however.

She sits back up, slowly, and once more her head finds it's way north. She has her chin pillowed against the curve of Mindfang's breasts and her hands rise up to stroke the back of Rosa's neck until she's a trilling, shivery mess and there isn't an ounce of tension left in her bones.

"Better now, Pet?" Mindfang asks her, after they've basked long enough that the water's beginning to chill and the tea, forgotten beside the bathtub, must be stone cold. Which is a pity, because that cake looked good.

She makes a non-committal noise. Mindfang snorts and Rosa's reasonably sure she rolls her eyes. Rosa pretends that she isn't aware of this reaction whatsoever and instead turns her head enough that she can brush her lips against the soft skin of Mindfang's breast. It's a painful angle to contort her
neck at and she can feel her horn meeting the resistance of Mindfang's head.

Mindfang makes a beautiful sound and, for once, she's the one to shiver. Rosa would like to see just how many noises she can be coaxed into making. It's remarkable to hear her trill and snarl, considering how rare her natural troll noises are. Her Alternian is impeccable, of course, voice accented with the slightest lilt of the upper-class and just a *tad* melodramatic and getting her to break that pattern is nearly impossible.

One of Mindfang's hands lifts out of the water, droplets falling off in a steady stream into the bath and sending ripples radiating out. She curls a protective hand around Rosa's ribcage, just beneath her breasts.

"Let's go to bed." She whispers, seductively, purring against her neck. "The sign at reception said that they have 1500 thread count sheets..."

Rosa slips a little lower and nuzzles her breasts. Mindfang moans and digs her nails, sharply, into her horns.

"Rosa, Pet, I'm sleepy," She begs, shooing her away with a whimper that's far too pathetic. Rosa sits back up immediately and tries not to look utterly embarrassed. It stings to have her advances rejected but Mindfang, upon glimpsing her face, chuckles.

She jabs her in the ribs until Rosa yelps and throws her head back. Mindfang seizes the chance to kiss her. For once she doesn't smell like jasmine or salt air and it's utterly disconcerting--

"We're not going to have sex for the first time in a bathtub in a random bed and breakfast in the middle of fucking nowhere. Not that I don't want to because *believe me* you keep your reproductive organs locked up tighter than the Empress's trident." Mindfang kisses her jaw and then sighs, loudly.

"Seriously. With the amount I've had to work in order to get between those legs there had better be fucking rose petals and fireworks."

"I am storing neither of those things in my reproductive organs." Rosa says with a sniff, feeling herself blush. The color spreads down her neck across her chest and Mindfang makes a ridiculous sound of pleasure. "Do you know how dangerous it would be to stick explosives up one's nook?"

"Yes. You need to move really fucking fast to get that shit out of there or you will have some serious problems when the droids come around."

"..." Rosa stops midway out of climbing out of the bath. Mindfang is making no attempt to move, apparently taking the moment to admire the view. At least, that's what Rosa surmises from the look of sheer, wicked delight spreading across her face. She's smiling like a fox that's just happened across an unguarded warren of newborn rabbits, her fangs showing and her eyes open just enough that Rosa's able to see how wide her pupils have blown with arousal.

Rosa stares at her, eyebrows furrowed, hardly able to understand what the hell she just said. "...Have you-- Have you placed explosives..."

She can't bring herself to say it. She *really* can't. So she picks up a towel and holds it out before her just enough to preserve some semblance of having modesty.

"What?" Mindfang clambers out of the tub, pausing just long enough to slap Rosa's ass *hard* before stealing the towel from her. "Don't look at me like that! It's the only place you can stuff dynamite and not have anyone look. Not my fault that it got stuck in there."
"...What in the world is wrong with you?"

"I'm horny as fuck and my repertoire of sexual forays is quite impressive." Mindfang says with a shrug, drying herself off just enough that she's no longer dripping water onto the marble floor.

Standing before Rosa in nothing but her bare skin, she's still absolutely unabashed. Her hair is billowing out behind her under it's own power, a large cloud of black curls that are begging to be tamed.

That's the only part of her, however, that needs any corralling whatsoever. She's wild but it's an exciting wildness, a wildness that reminds Rosa of an untamed sea. Which isn't at all surprising, of course, but-- well-- she's beautiful. Beautiful, bold and unabashed about a single inch of herself.

Rosa wonders what that feels like to be so beautiful. To feel so satisfied with your own skin that you can luxuriate in your nudity. She doesn't look at her, though. She doesn't stare at her breasts or let her eyes trace the curve of her tiny waist or the fullness of her hips. But her eyes linger on the flesh of her arms, the thickness of her thighs, the sculpted arches of her calves and ankles--

She's not at all ashamed of herself and it embarrasses Rosa, for some reason, to see her standing there without a stitch of cloth on her body without a care in the world. Her face is glowing green, almost like a tinted light bulb, and she has to look away.

Could she ever be like that? Standing before someone else and allow herself to be looked at. To be looked at and admired and cosseted and kissed and stroked--

To have Mindfang lying atop of her, cataloging her body like a rare and beautiful treasure as if her skin is pure silver and her scars are molten emeralds. To be adored. To feel so comfortable in the body she's been given that she can let herself be worshiped and inhaled like the steam off of a cup of tea--

"My darling girl," Mindfang purrs, wrapping a towel around Rosa like she's somehow incapable of drying herself. It's far too large and it hangs around her like a robe. "Don't look so sad. I promise not to stick dynamite up any of your orifices."

Rosa smiles as best as she can. "Thank you, Mistress. You're very benevolent."

"Not to say I won't tie you up and have my way with you." Mindfang says with a voice that's a little too wicked to be believed. She kisses her forehead and her lips are cold, her hands frozen. "I'm not going to leave you here, you know that-- don't you?"

Despite herself, despite everything she knows in her heart and feels down to the very marrow of her bones, she nods. She nods and melts into Mindfang, collapsing against her body as fully as she can. Mindfang supports her, of course, and sweeps her off her feet.

She drops her onto the bed without making so much as a halfhearted attempt to dry or clothe her. They're both more than a little damp but there's a huge fire in the hearth and the bed is covered in a pile of blankets. They burrow beneath the covers like adolescent girls, Mindfang flopping around in the bed in an attempt to dry herself on the sheets. Rosa lets her. She also lets Mindfang wrap herself around her like an oversized naked blanket, the only thing separating them the towel that Rosa clings to like a life ring.

"Fuck, I pity you way too much." Mindfang mutters into her shoulder, making endearing little noises as she struggles to get comfortable. "I can't decide if I want to kiss you for eight hours or ravish you until we're both unconscious."
Mindfang nuzzles into her until Rosa relaxes against her embrace and lets herself be prodded into a comfortable position against Mindfang's side.

She knows she should be returning these affectionate aphorisms, whispering "I pity you too," because she does but not in the sentiment that Mindfang is expressing it, or she should murmur into her ear "I love you" or goodness knows what else but-- she's so tired.

So she squeezes Mindfang's hand, the one sneaking towards her breasts, and closes her eyes. "Can't we do both? Four hours of kissing and ravished to half-consciousness?"

"Does this mean we have to go halfway on the kinky scale too? Because that's not acceptable to my libido. The hell would that even look like? Only tying half of you up? One wrist and one ankle? Eye patch instead of a blindfold?"

Rosa starts to laugh. Laugh harder than either of them expected, apparently, because Mindfang makes a startled noise and then starts to laugh too, hearty guffaws that ricochet out of her diaphragm into her throat.

"Well I bet that's something you've never tried, at least," Rosa says, wryly. "And certainly an improvement over dynamite up the nook."

"Oi. Oi that worked out great, okay. They thought I was masturbating and then BAM lit dynamite, busted out of the holding cell and stole the book I wanted."

"You stuck dynamite up your reproductive organs to steal a book?" Rosa asks with a yawn, her incredulity dampened by her exhausted and the growing warmth generated by their bodies. "Oh my, Mistress, I wonder what you'd do to steal jewels."

"Ugh anyone can have jewels. It's knowledge that's power. Knowledge and experience. I'd rather have a new story to tell than a diamond necklace. And I'd certainly rather have you to entertain me instead of all the gold in the hold of the Widow."

"Mmmm that's sweet of you to say, but I doubt it."

"The fuck am I going to do with gold? I'm a Marquise. I've got all the money I'll ever need and I can always get more." Mindfang's starting to sound more than a little silly, her voice melting like wax in sunshine as she drifts off to sleep. "Where am I going to find another one of you or Marcus or even that tool down at the check in desk? Nowhere, that's where."

"I'm still rather hung up on the dynamite--" Rosa cuts her off before things can get too existential. They're wandering into dangerous philosophical territory and Rosa would rather like to preserve her pirate fantasy a little longer. Not that Mindfang isn't a brilliant pirate, of course but-- well--

It's different than reading about it. Living with a pirate, that is. Mindfang's more than a mercenary and she's certainly more than a bored murderer.

"Look, Rosa, it's not hard. I was visiting the home of a collector of rare books who knew I was a pirate but the only way I'd be able to get near the books I wanted was to create a damn good distraction." Mindfang makes an extravagant hand gesture that has the side effect of undoing Rosa's towel. She yanks it back over herself with a loud yelp. "So when he had me over for supper, I jammed a stick of dynamite up in there and did my best not to sit down."

Rosa winces. Mindfang makes a noise of agreement and laughs. "He had me stuck in the cellar less than five minutes after I got there-- the second I asked to see his collection he freaked out-- I waited until everyone was asleep, yanked out the dynamite, lit it and
then used some rather handy vodka to blow up the door." Rosa mutters under her breath that she probably drank most of it before using it as an incendiary and Mindfang jabs her in the ribs.

"In the ensuing chaos over the fire, I broke into the library and took the books, slipped out of the window and then saw the nearest lady doctor to see what the hell I could do to treat the irritation from the gunpowder against my, you know--"

"Reproductive organs." Rosa supplies, yawning so widely her jaw cracks. Mindfang's yawn follows suit, just as long, wide and loud.

"Yes. Those." Mindfang says, sleepily. Rosa can't remember Mindfang ever being the one to fall asleep first, nor can she recollect what it feels to be the one cuddled. It's nice. It's as nice as sinking into a warm bath after a day spent in a carriage pulled through a storm.

They fall into halcyon silence, broken only by Mindfang's breaths. Rosa's sure her own breathing is there too, but it's far harder to hear that. All she wants to listen to are the sleepy noises her Mistress makes as she uses her as a living pillow and feel the way her body shifts as all stress ebbs from it like a retreating tide.

"Sweet dreams," Rosa murmurs as she feels Mindfang's consciousness melt away. "Don't drift too far."

"Relax," Mindfang mumbles, barely awake enough to respond. Her voice is beautiful and if Rosa could describe it, the only terms she could use would be lavender honey, sweet with the faintest tint of bittersweetness. "You're the only harbor I'll ever need."

* * *

They wake up early the next day and dress in fresh clothes, Mindfang in black and Rosa in a dove gray number she didn't know she owned. Their breakfast is absolutely heavenly, considering how attentive the wait staff is; Rosa knows it's due to Mindfang's rather unique ability to lie but she pretends it's because they're just exceptional at their jobs.

The horses look happier today, heads held high, and their driver looks much better after a good night's sleep. Mindfang settles in the carriage's cabin and pulls out her journal almost immediately. Rosa takes out her knitting and they repeat the previous day's process with one exception-- Mindfang won't stop sneaking glances at her. It's better than being ignored in favor of a historical novel but it's still creepy.

It takes two hours of covert eyeballing for Rosa to crack, throwing her half-knitted shawl into her lap and asking, her voice far too high-pitched "What in the world are you doing?"

Mindfang squeaks-- squeaks-- and immediately clutches her journal to her chest. "Nothing! I'm not doing anything!"

"You're examining me like I'm a fascinating medical specimen and you're attempting to decide what to experiment on first. It's making me uncomfortable."

"Maybe I just like your boobs." She mutters, huffily. She's beginning to blush and it's cute but nerve wracking.

Rosa throws a ball of yarn at her. While Mindfang's distracted by it smacking her in the forehead, Rosa reaches out and plucks her journal from her hands.
Mindfang makes a dismayed sound and dives across the carriage. Rosa's reflexes have recovered enough that she's able to pull the journal aside long enough to peruse it more thoroughly. Mindfang has been drawing her, meticulously.

It's not something she expected. At all.

"I didn't know you drew." She says, softly, giving Mindfang a bemused smile. "Although, in retrospect, I assume all those sketches in your journals are your work?"

"Yes." Mindfang takes her journal back, glaring a little. "I like to draw. Don't be mean--"

"I'm not being mean. I just wanted to know why you were being so ridiculous."

This conversation continues for a good hour. Eventually it devolves into a discussion of hobbies, followed by a discussion on metaphysics and then, finally, a discussion on art that Rosa can barely follow as Mindfang begins throwing terminology around like it's nothing.

Their talk lasts them to their destination, apparently, because just as they're beginning to have an awkwardly one sided discussion about Renaissance sculpture, the carriage starts. Mindfang slips out of the cabin the moment their coachman opens the door, not even bothering to say something along the lines of 'thank goodness we're here' or 'come along, pet!'. She just gets out.

She turns and offers Rosa her hand, of course, and Rosa steps down after her. And clings. But Mindfang doesn't offer her any comfort. They've pulled up in front of a gorgeous hotel with a sprawling courtyard, complete with a small orchard and a fountain before the hotel's brick facade. It's not tall, but it's sprawling, and the windows are diamond paned. There's beautiful designs tooled into the stone and it looks like something out of a fairy book.

Rosa can see the faint gleam of the ocean behind the building, and hear waves crashing against a cliff. The air is warm and balmy, full of the scent of flowers and delicious food--

She doesn't like it. At all. Well, she does but-- it's different. And she's not sure how she feels about it. She's come to think of the Widow as her home, and seeing that it's not is upsetting--

Rosa clings to her coat and tries not to cry. She doesn't like this-- she really doesn't like this. At all. She wants back on the ship now, please--

"I have your knitting in my purse, Pet," Mindfang murmurs, completely misinterpreting her anxiety. "And it's sunset, so we might just be better off going to bed and get started tomorrow--"

"I'm scared--"

"Don't be scared, it's a lovely hotel. I've been there three times before. It's really pretty, there's a pool, you can see the sea from any room on the premises, there's lots of beautiful museums within walking distance--"

Rosa listens to her with half of an ear, too busy burying her fingers into the seal fur of Mindfang's coat as a means of ceasing her tears.

"Rosa, really. We're going to go and have a gorgeous retreat, aren't we? We're going to spend weeks languishing on the seaside and I'll show you all the art you ever wanted to see and we'll go see a few shows and look at the gardens--"

"Do you mean it?"
"No, Rosa, no, I sailed thousands of kilometers out of my way, reserved a hotel via letter, made arrangements to have someone drive us there and told Marcus to keep the ship here for a good month or so just so we could go to another country and have sex for an hour so and then just come back."

"I don't know how I feel about that, but I still have the sneaking suspicion that exact scenario is going to occur."

"Rosa!" Mindfang says, gasping, with the uttermost attitude of mock scandal. "Rosa, my darling, my turtledove, my love--"

"I wouldn't put it past you. And using terms of endearment aren't going to dissuade me."

Mindfang smiles, her face going soft and warm and wonderful. "Darling. We're going to check in, have a nice dinner and go to bed. Then we're going to spend a few weeks looking at paintings and eating far too much food and then we'll get a new crew together, restock the ship and set sail for another few months. *There's nothing to be afraid of.*"

"Promise?" Rosa asks in a voice that's more confident than she expected. "Do you promise that I won't be arrested, tried by a mock jury and executed for my son's beliefs?"

"...Nothing like that will ever happen while I'm around. I promise you that." Mindfang takes her hand and kisses it, making a sad, small noise in the back of her throat. "C'mon. We don't want the restaurant to close."

* * *

Mindfang insists that she doesn't need to worry after the trunks and that it's perfectly alright to leave them with the coachmen and the valets who appear out of the hotel grounds. They walk up the cobblestone path to the hotel's front door arm in arm.

Rosa's carrying Mindfang's satchel because she had to do *something* to be useful. Mindfang keeps up a litany of comforting words, talking about the year the hotel was built, the historical significance of the architecture, what famous citizens have been in residence-- most of it, however, is lost on Rosa, who's too busy quelling a panic attack to listen.

Then, they push through the front doors into a place that's a veritable paradise and Rosa's breath stills in her lungs. She stands, staring around her in abject awe as she waits for Mindfang to have a similar reaction.

She doesn't, of course, although she does kiss Rosa on the cheek and laugh a little at the stunned look on her face.

"Go wait for me over there," She murmurs, waving to a couch across the lobby. "I'll get us settled in and then we'll have ourselves a nice supper."

Rosa nods and shuffles across the room.

The hotel is beautiful. The floor is covered in a beautifully polished marble the color of sand, the walls are made of a whitewashed brick and there's windows everywhere. The rounded tops of them are inset with glittering jewels of glass. A fire is flickering in the gorgeously carved fireplace despite the warmth of the day outside. There's a breeze blowing in from the ocean, sending the white chiffon of the curtains billowing in the wind, and it carries with it the smell of salt air and the slightest chill.

Rosa can see the sea from here, over the edge of the swimming pool that's been tiled in turquoise and gold mosaics. She can see the sun as it drifts beneath the horizon and the stars as they begin to glitter
The whole place is absolutely stunning; crystal chandeliers, gilded porcelain vases loaded with freshly cut white roses. There are bookshelves near the elevators covered in leather bound and gilded tomes--the carpets are hand-woven and brilliantly colored--

It's different from anything she's ever seen. Far different from the place Mindfang dragged her to up in the northern reaches; for one thing, Rosa knew they're going to be taking up a temporary residence and for another, this place has been built with a luxuriant attention to detail that makes her carefully quashed desire for the finer things go slightly berserk.

Mindfang's sitting at the reception desk, signing papers and chatting amiably with the woman working reception who seems to recognize her. Rosa's not at all surprised; judging from the performance the night before, Mindfang knows how to work a crowd in a way that will cement her assumed identity in anyone's mind.

"Can I get you anything, Madame?" A waiter appears at Rosa's side, an officious smile on his face. He's dressed in a suit that's absolutely pristine, black linen with a perfectly tied bowtie at his neck. "Compliments of the house, of course." He says before Rosa can say no.

She gives him a considering stare before deciding *fuck all*, they're on vacation. "If you have a good white wine that would be lovely?" She asks, not sure *why* that's a question.

"Of course, Madame. Do you have a preference of vintage?"

What the hell does that even mean? Ugh. It must have something to do with the year the wine was *something* but she doesn't know quite what. "Um. Would you think to terribly of me if I said I don't?"

He smiles and winks. "It's hotel policy not to think anything but the best of our guests."

"Then I trust your judgment." Rosa says with a laugh. The sound if it attracts Mindfang's attention and she immediately spins in her chair to give her a concerned look. Rosa waves a little and her eyes narrow suspiciously but she turns back to arranging their rooms without seeming to be too upset.

Hmm. Perhaps this might be a tolerably pleasant experience. Rosa's still clutching Mindfang's purse and she opens it, pulling out her knitting. She gets through only half a row before her new friend appears with a single glass of wine on a silver tray. He places the glass on the side table along with a bowl of almonds that, upon closer inspection, are sugar coated.

"I didn't know I could feel this strongly about a man." Rosa says, slowly, staring at him. "Thank you."

He laughs and bows. "I'm happy to have made your night more enjoyable, Madame, but I doubt the Marquise would be happy if I stole you away."

"Fair enough." Rosa says, smiling. "Thank you."

"Making yourself comfy?" Mindfang asks, sinking onto the couch beside her. She tucks her feet up onto the cushion and snuggles in to Rosa's side, eyes drifting shut. "Glad to see it."

"I've quite changed my mind. This is nice. Can we always have attractive young men bringing me wine?" She asks, mellowly, and Mindfang growls a little and pinches her thigh.

"Attractive young women bringing me wine?" Rosa amends, purring just a little. "After all, I do
think it would be more pleasant to be attracted to one's servants."

"Fine. We'll hire you a bunch of attractive young boys to serve you wine. But they're not allowed to watch." Mindfang groused, reaching over to stroke her fingers down Rosa's bare calf.

Rosa does not need to ask what they're not allowed to watch. But now doesn't seem like the time to remind her Mistress that they're not yet having sex.

"Aren't we going to get supper?" Mindfang begs, her voice ridiculously sweet. She's pouting like a champion, lip jutting out in the most luscious way.

Rosa sips her wine, slowly. Mindfang makes a face at her lack of response and sits up to steal the glass from her hand. She glowers and finishes off the rest of the wine.

"Mistress says food now." Mindfang says, slowly, like Rosa's a cave troll who has difficulty comprehending words more than one syllable. "Or Mistress mad."

"Fine, fine." Rosa says, giggling when Mindfang starts to nibble at her neck. "Mistress, that tickles--"

* * *

They eat dinner, quickly, as the restaurant is due to close quite soon. Dessert is sent to their room instead of eaten at the table and it's the first thing to greet them when they open their suite.

The room is big. Rooms would possibly be more appropriate; there's a little sitting area with a roaring fire, an impressively large balcony with doors that can be pulled away to give the impression of openness.

Their bed is, of course, the pinnacle of the room. It's gargantuan and covered in pristine white linens- a beautiful white comforter, white sheets a white blanket and, of course, a mountain of white pillows.

"Not bad, huh?" Mindfang asks, coyly, as Rosa wanders around with her mouth agape. "I'm particularly fond of the view. I stayed here last time and I kind of might have insisted on getting the same room just so I could show you the sunset."

"I'd prefer to examine the bed." Rosa says, absently, staring at the bathroom because good heavens it's huge with a bathtub big enough to fit five of them and an impressively tiled shower.

Mindfang looms up behind her, wrapping her arms around her waist and all but devouring her neck. "Mmm I'd prefer to examine you in the bed."

Rosa giggles.

* * *

They get a late start the next morning, having spent the early hours of dawn fighting to sleep, finding it impossible and then getting distracted by a particularly enthralling murder mystery that Mindfang produces out of her suitcase and then-- well-- halfway through they fell asleep on top of each other.

Mindfang knows the city well. It's endearing to see her get all aflutter as she rattles off facts like the alphabet, A is for a restaurant I once lit on fire, B is for by that fountain I totally mugged a guy, C is for can't I just have a nice vacation for once, D is for don't think so, E is for...

Rosa doesn't know what E is for. Enough of this metaphor? Probably. Mindfang's knowledge of the
city is staggering either way. Every restaurant has a story, every house has some piece of history hidden inside its walls like the last ember in a fire, and each tree has seen a lifetime of comedy and tragedy beneath its boughs. Mindfang knows it all and is abounding with eagerness to share it.

She likes showing off, Rosa knows that much after so many months. But she's not showing off for the sake of making herself seem cleverer-- she knows she's cleverer-- but to put a smile on Rosa's face when she points out the way in which the column of a centuries old house has been carved to look like a flower and what that means and who might have lived there. Rosa could listen to her talk all day if need be, story after story washing over her in a haze of delicious experience.

But Mindfang has an agenda, as oblique as it might be. They visit museums and temples and historical sites that are demarcated with the Imperial seal. It's all so grand and important-- Rosa knows these places, she's read about them in books and at one point, she was probably inside most of the temples Mindfang drags her through. But there's something about her narration that brings them to life in a way that a service witness through the haziness of a black lace veil could never do.

They have a late lunch, walk around a little bit more and, eventually, end up wandering the streets.

"We don't have anything to do until supper," Mindfang says, thoughtfully. "We could do a bit of shopping?"

Rosa shrugs. "Whatever you want to do is quite fine by me, Mistress."

Mindfang gives her a bright, glowing smile. She squeezes Rosa's hand and they proceed to get utterly lost. Mindfang seems incredibly pleased to have such a laid back companion to lead around and seems absolutely content to let Rosa ask all the questions she wants and answers them... in detail.

That is, of course, until they find a bookstore. It's a little shop with a dusty window and the sign is still hand-painted. It says 'books' in both the Traditional and Adratic Alternian and-- well--

"Rosa, Pet, it would mean the world to me if we could go in here." Mindfang whispers, her eyes going hugely round. "Please, sweetheart--"

Rosa rolls her eyes and pushes the door open. Mindfang all but dives inside. The store is full to bursting with books, shelves making up a labyrinth of knowledge. Mindfang's quick to disappear into the stacks and Rosa's left lingering near the door. The books are old, new, beaten, torn, stained, freshly printed-- Rosa can see why Mindfang's so excited.

She takes her time wandering around. A few romance novels immediately jump out at her and she eyes them askance before pulling a few of them into her arms.

Mindfang's horns are visible just over a tall pile of books and Rosa keeps them in the corner of her vision for as long as she can... until she's distracted by a section of classic literature.

Rosa has, of course, not read any of it. Classic literature was not something particularly well-received underground, and the allowed novels weren't really anything she'd enjoyed reading.

She eyes the spines with something akin to a sweet feeling of rebellion flourishing in her stomach. A single title sticks out at her, the title of a book known for half a century as the upper echelon of dissenting literature. The training instilled in her through decades of religious sisterhood kicks in as soon as she takes a look at it.

Oh to hell with it. Who's going to report her for reading anti-establishmentarian literature? Mindfang? Hardly. She yanks the book off the shelf.
Rosa opens it with her pulse fluttering anxiously in the base of her throat. Everything she was ever taught tells her that this is not a book suitable for a woman in her position. That is to say it’s a book unsuitable for a Sister guarding the Mother Grub. There isn't anyone in the world who would stake the claim that the only Apostate sister of ten generations isn't allowed to read whatever she damn well pleases. But an inbred need to please authority is demanding for her to place the book back on the shelf where she found it where it can be ingeniously covered in dust to slowly rot away as is proper for such... dissident literature.

But it's beautiful. Everything about it is beautiful, from the gold embossed spine to the intricately illustrated flyleafs to the finely gilded illuminated letter of the first paragraph introducing the text of the poem. Her hands shake as she turns the first page, stealing another nervous glance over her shoulder to make sure that no one is about to startle her with illicit literature and demand she be imprisoned at once. It's not a very viable fear, since Mindfang is hardly likely to consent to anyone arresting the Dolorosa, let alone touch her long enough to get handcuffs on but-- well--

What if it makes Mindfang angry? She stares at the beautifully drawn 'O' that marks the place where prose has transitioned to poetry. She's almost too afraid to read further but-- well--

She does so anyways, feeling like a misbehaving child.

"Good book. My favorite bit is when they talk about how the Gods of the Darkest Ring create the seas." Mindfang's voice is low and tenebrous over her shoulder. Rosa almost drops the book, catches it and then-- well-- slams it into the shelf. "What part's your favorite?"

"I-- I don't know." She admits with a timid voice that cracks. "I-- I've never read this before."

"What?" Mindfang nearly drops her stack of books, her eyes going comically wide above her pile. Her chin is keeping them carefully balanced, however, and evidently they're precious enough she won't surrender them in favor of Rosa. "You haven't read this?"

"N--No."

"Oh my god, Rosa! Where were you living! In a cave!?"

"Yes." Rosa smirks despite herself because, well, Mindfang looks so absolutely devastated by this fact that she can't feel at all afraid that retribution will be forthcoming.

"Well. That's still no excuse." She mutters, glaring. "Come on, you have to have heard of it at least! Famous poem? Detailing the fall of Alternia from an idyllic state to a monstrously dictated empire? Basic argument is that we dissolved into a violently hedonistic society because of the corrupt nature of our glorious Empress?"

"Mistress!" Rosa hisses, because while she might agree-- well-- it's hardly the forum for this sort of discussion. Mindfang, however, looks less than concerned.

"Rosa, for the love of god, what else haven't you read?"

"...I don't know." She says, her voice hitching. "They wouldn't really allow us to read much of anything that could be seen as seditious or revolutionary or offensive or encouraging of a desire to leave the Caverns, or--"

"So what the fuck were you allowed to read?"

"...Mostly religious texts and smuggled in romance novels that the Superior didn't want to argue about."
"Oh, yes, because letting a bunch of cloistered women do nothing but read the writings of psychotic clowns and poorly written erotica is a great idea." Mindfang rolls her eyes. "So, what? They give you a basic education and skip over all of the scandalous bits?"

Rosa shrugs, coloring a little. She doesn’t want Mindfang to think of her as uneducated but, well, she's clever enough to know that her knowledge has gaps.

"They taught us history, of course," She says, pulling the book in her hands close to her chest. "And sums. And we learned about proper etiquette, societal customs. How to write and speak. Biology was a component of the job, of course."

Rosa shrugs and frowns a little. She's horrified to learn that she's ashamed of her educational background. Oh goodness. Enslaved and uneducated. "I guess I'm rather stupid by your standards."

"Hardly." Mindfang rolls her eyes. Rosas's nudged by one of her hips and she feels her lips press into her neck. "You had a formal education it sounds like."

"Yes, we had private tutors." Who she rather expected were killed after working with them, but she doesn't like to think about that. Secrets are meant to be kept secret, after all.

"My Guardian wasn't exactly fond of me." Mindfang says, softly, and her face flickers into darkness quite suddenly. "I did my best on my own and spent a few years at the naval academy before, well... expelling myself."

Rosa would like to hug her, but given the sort of morning she's been having she half expects to be thrown to the floor and kissed senseless if she does. But she reaches out and runs a hand down Mindfang's arm all the same. She gets a grateful, sincere smile in return.

"I also had a few knitting books?" She murmurs, trying to pull Mindfang's attention away from the darkness. "I got one of the tutors to teach me how to knit. She was kind enough to find me some material on the subject."

"Okay, I would pretend to know what that is for the sake of not hurting your feelings, but I'm pretty sure that's a made up thing." Mindfang gives her a warm grin that speaks volumes. "Never heard of anyone knitting--"

"Knitting?" Rosa asks, as doubtfully as she can, given the fact that Mindfang has spent probably a good fifty hours watching her knit. "No, Mistress, Knitting is a very real thing. It's a process executed with the aid of yarn and two wooden needles with the repetition of a stitch pattern to form an article of clothing--"

"Yeah, that sounds boring and I think I hate it." Mindfang purrs, kissing her cheek. "I can't see anyone enjoying it. Or writing books about it."

Rosa gives her a wry grin. "Well I don't. Hate it. That is."

"Well you do that then." Mindfang mutters, rolling her eyes. But she nuzzles Rosa's neck affectionately enough, abating some of her rancor. "Oh my god I have so many things for you to read now, you don't even have any idea--"

She takes off with an excited stream of chatter. Rosa follows with her book still clutched in her hands. Mindfang places her gigantic pile of books on the shop's counter and the shopkeeper gives her a dazed stare of amazement.

"Can you hold these while I go back for more?" Mindfang asks with her brightest smile. She likes
books, Rosa realizes with the secret, glowing warmth of knowing an intimate fact about a secretive person. She loves books, really, and that's not something that should surprise her given the amount of scrawling she does in her journals. But it's an endearing fact all the same. Rosa wants to indulge that love, pour her a cup of tea and curl up next to her on a couch-- knitting while Mindfang reads to her.

It's a ridiculously domestic fantasy. Domestic and romantic, a picture of a home that's full of warmth and affection. Rosa would like that. She'd like that a lot. But she can't have it, of course. How would she? It doesn't make any sense.

But it's hard to think like that when Mindfang's grabbing her hand and dragging her off into the recesses of the bookstore once more, her fingers brushing over titles like she's caressing a lover and her voice taking on a husky burr that Rosa hasn't heard her use before.

This, it's clear, is where her passion lies. Here within these tomes, inlaid in the hundreds of thousands of words that make up each chapter. Rosa would hedge a bet that the only reason she took to the seas was to find more things to read and once she was there decided she might as well write a few adventures herself.

She's handing Rosa books without bothering to do much more than name them and it's breathtaking how beautiful she looks in the soft, warm light of the store and how at home she seems among the dusty shelves and paper smells. Things smell old but in a marvelous sort of way, a way that remind her of bygone eras.

Mindfang's glowing like a woman who's just fallen in love. Rosa wonders if her temper would get better if she resigned her captaincy and got a position as a librarian because, well, this is her element. "God do I want to kiss you." Rosa breathes before she can think better of it.

Mindfang nearly drops the new stack of books she's holding. But she manages to regain her composure, turning her head around to give Rosa an arch stare.

Once more she acts on impulse, leaning in and stealing a kiss. Mindfang's lips are as welcoming as always, even though she's smiling like a hyena. It's a chaste kiss, with no hint of anything untoward attempted on either end.

When Rosa pulls away, she lingers. Mindfang chuckles and mumbles, softly: "You're so sweet."

"You belong in here." Rosa says, softly. "Chronicled with the best of them."

"You're perfect." Mindfang murmurs, nuzzling in close and closing her eyes. "I'm lucky to have you."

Rosa wants to inform her it's not luck, its business savvy and having enough money to pay for her but, well, that doesn't seem quite reasonable at the moment.

Mindfang has a stack of ten books before they retreat back to the counter. She sets them on the countertop, much to the surprise of the shopkeeper who suddenly seems very glad to see them.

They end up having to ask the bookseller to send most of the books to the hotel later on... mostly because neither of them feels like carrying the load.

"What are we doing for dinner?" Rosa asks as they once more begin to make a circuit of town.

"The city's orchestra is having a performance at the local amphitheater. The hotel promised to put together a picnic dinner for us and I thought it might be nice to have a lovely supper outside on the
"...When did you find time for this?"

"While you were flirting with the waiter last night." Mindfang teases, giving Rosa a grin. "C'mon. You'll have fun."

* * *

It's been a nice night, as far as all things are considered. The food had been expertly prepared, the wine carefully chosen and the music absolutely harmonious. She'd spent the entirety of the concert curled up at Mindfang's side, her hand wrapped up within her Mistress's.

Rosa wasn't entirely sure about an outdoor concert, nor was she on board with a picnic. It all seems rather uncouth as far as standards for societal behavior go, but she was wrong. It was quite civilized and altogether rather pleasant.

She's almost asleep by the time that the music ends. Rosa means no offense to the musicians, of course, they're quite a talented group of young people and their performance isn't anything less than stellar but, well--

Relaxation isn't a luxury she's familiar with. Her response to anything less that the most strident of stress is to sleep. And between the balmy night air, the headiness of the alcohol and Mindfang's softness at her side, she feels utterly safe and warm. She's brought back to consciousness only when Mindfang stands up and, suddenly, her side is cold.

"Rosa, Pet," Mindfang laughs, catching sight of her bewildered face, "Did you sleep through the whole performance? I thought I was giving you a lovely night."

She yawns a little but she's not truly tired, of course. Just tired in a way that fills your bones when you've been sitting for quite some time, safe and warm. Still, she allows Mindfang to help her up and adjust her shawl around her shoulders, smooth out her hair and look her over.

"It was a lovely night." Rosa murmurs, smiling. "It was so lovely I thought it was a dream."

"Flatterer," Mindfang scoffs, but she takes her hand and squeezes it. "Let's head back home, shall we?"

"The ship's an awful long way off, Mistress," Rosa teases, smiling a little and Mindfang huffs. There are, however, the beginnings of a very pleased smile forming at the corners of her mouth and Rosa leans into her until an arm slips through hers.

They start back towards the hotel arm in arm. Rosa can smell flowers in the air just as well as she can smell Mindfang's perfume; it's heavenly and just like something out of a novel. Magnolias, gardenias, wisteria, lilies-- it's an intoxicating bouquet of aromas that makes her shiver in a way that's born purely of physical enjoyment. The warm breeze brings with it the taste of sea air that makes Rosa feel almost at home. The stars gleam in the air above them, as if they're diamonds that have been thrown there and forgotten--

Everything is going straight to her head. Her mind is spinning as if she's full of strong drink and, even though she's still in full possession of her faculties, she feels as young and free and giddy as she ever has.

Beautiful woman at her side, food in her stomach, nothing but sleeping and lazing about to fill her days-- it's... it's a nice change. She doesn't like to say it, but-- well-- it's true. It's a nice change to
finally feel alive and free of responsibility.

She feels like she can get away with anything; like she can laugh and drink and celebrate without discretion—and it's a good feeling. A very good feeling. An even better feeling than self-pity.

Youthful folly isn't something she's familiar with. Not in the slightest. So when she stops walking in the middle of the cobblestone path, it takes all of her courage to remain still when Mindfang turns to frown at her, questioningly.

"Rosa?" She asks, laughing a little and raising an eyebrow as Rosa tugs her down an alleyway to where it's just a little bit darker. "Darling, what in the world--"

She cuts her off with a kiss. Not just any kiss, either, a deep, passionate one that requires her to throw herself into Mindfang's arms, twine her hands into Mindfang's hair and tug, hard. It's not their most refined moment, of course; Mindfang reacts to the sudden attention by letting out a startled gasp and then a pleased purr and finally a bone-melting moan.

She tastes like wine and just a little bit like lipstick. Rosa doesn't let that phase her in the slightest as she assumes her own mouth must be equally similar in flavor--

Mindfang's tongue curls around her own. That's the only way to describe it and Rosa feels her knees start to get more than a little unstable beneath her. Mindfang solves this dilemma by shoving her, hard, into the wall. Her horns catch the exposed ivy covering the bricks and dirt rains down onto her hair. She breaks off their embrace to squeak and glance up at her invisible assailant.

Her Mistress does not like this. She growls and Rosa feels the hands against her waist grow insistent. When she fails to resume the kiss in a timely fashion, Mindfang leans in and captures her lower lip with her teeth. Rosa's immediately brought back to attention at the feel of two needlepoint fangs and she moans this time.

Mindfang's tongue swipes over her lower lip in what she takes as an apology and Rosa responds by allowing her. This is nice. This is very nice. All she can think about is the warm brush of Mindfang's breath across her face, the slight scratch of her salt-weathered lips against Rosa's own, the feel of her hands as they begin to wander--

And wander they do-- quite remarkably. Rosa's shawl falls to her elbows as Mindfang's hands slip up to grasp her neck, caress her chin--

"Naughty," Mindfang pants against her ear when they pause for breath. "You naughty girl."

Rosa does her best to approximate Mindfang's purr. This is a good idea because she moans, deeply and all but attacks her throat, biting down with the gentlest of affection.

It's unexpectedly arousing. She moans like Mindfang's rubbing velvet against her skin and Mindfang trills and then-- well--

She can't find it in her to object when Mindfang's hand slips beneath the bodice of her dress. She can't even find it in her to object when she starts growling about her bustier being too tight. At least she's not wearing a corset (like Mindfang probably is).

Mostly because, well, the feel of lace pressing against her skin is absolutely luscious. The feel of her salt-roughened hands against her breasts are even more rewarding, however and she begins kissing Mindfang with a renewed passion and half-heartedly wonders whether or not she should start doing something exciting in retaliation but-- no--
She just keeps kissing her instead, getting far too acquainted with how exhilarating it feels to be touched. This is-- well--

Rosa makes a ridiculous noise when Mindfang's open mouth presses against her throat with the pressing feel of the flats of her teeth.


"Leg," Mindfang pants, heavily, against her ear. "Get your leg up--"

It's hard, but Rosa manages, hooking her leg around Mindfang's hips and digging her heel into her back. Mindfang's pressed up against her almost immediately, barely any room left for either of them to breathe. Rosa squirms until she can get her hands against Mindfang's neck. She brushes her fingertips against the feathering of hair along the nape of her neck and Mindfang lets out a veritable cacophony of vowels.

Rosa feels her skin tremble and giggles self-consciously at knowing she did that. Mindfang's skin is covered in raised bumps, as if she's caught a chill on the breeze, but in the little alleyway they're hidden in, the air is like a silk scarf, warm without being stifling.

They keep kissing like there's nothing else in the world they could be doing, breaking for breath only when one of them absolutely must. The overwhelming feeling of physical attraction is overtaking her slowly yet surely, like a fire struggling to spread across damp wood. The longer their lips touch, the deeper the flames take root.

Mindfang rocks her hips against Rosa's, slow and deliberately. Rosa groans against Mindfang's mouth and Mindfang snickers a little.

She repeats the gesture even more slowly, pushing Rosa's leg even higher up on her spine. Rosa moans and her hands fly up to cup Mindfang's jaw.

Before she knows what's happening, Mindfang's slipping her fingers beneath her dress. Her Mistress's fingers sink into the flesh of her thigh and she continues rocking against her in slow, rolling motions as they kiss. Rosa's breath goes in sharp and slow as she attempts to decide how she feels about this.

The decision is made for her when she feels Mindfang's hand begin to stroke her thigh. Eventually, her fingers are pressing against her inner thigh and she moans, throatily then--

Then--

Shoves her away. Shoves her away hard and then covers her mouth with her hands, horrified. Mindfang stares back.

"...I'm sorry." Rosa gasps, blushing. "I'm so sorry-- I just-- I'm not-- I'm not ready--"

"No, no Pet--" Mindfang reaches out for her. Rosa stiffens. Mindfang ignores this and hugs her all the same. "No, it's fine. It's fine."

She helps Rosa straighten her clothes and plucks the leaves out of her hair. Mindfang is being... well... surprisingly understanding. She holds Rosa's hand and walks alongside her like they never stopped to rut in an alleyway. Rosa knows they're both thinking the same thing-- they want to have sex.

But Mindfang seems to recognize that she's not ready. As heated as their kiss may have been she
doesn't seem to think it was a promise of anything more.

"I bet the bar's still open," She muses out loud, giving Rosa a coy smile and nudging her neck with her nose. "We'll get you a glass of white wine, scrounge me up a nice cocktail--"

"You hate mixed drinks. You say they're for wimpy men and lesser women who can't handle the shame of having to get themselves drunk to face the horror of having sex with their significant others."

Mindfang snorts, possibly at her delivery and possibly at hearing her own words so expertly parodied. "Okay. Well. I might have said that--"

Rosa cracks a smile, showing one of her own eyeteeth. "You also say that the point of alcohol is to taste it, not to drown it in other flavors that kill off the mastery it takes to create an alcoholic beverage--"

"Rosaaaaaaa. Stop listening to me so much." Mindfang spins her around like they're dancing, in a beautiful semi-waltz that would only pass muster at the poorest of finishing schools. Rosa's sure that Mindfang's teachers would have a conniption.

Rosa laughs. Mindfang throws an arm around her shoulder and pulls her close, kissing the crown of her head.

"On occasion I like to wash down shitty vodka with a bit of simple syrup, pomegranate juice and a slice of lime--" Mindfang sounds uncharacteristically wistful.

Rosa laughs but her brain is racing for subjects to keep Mindfang away from thinking about sex or asking about sex or brining sex up in conversation any way whatsoever--

"I don't know what a pomegranate is," She admits as they continue ambling towards their hotel.

"Whatttttt oh my goodness, Rosa, you poor deprived baby,"

This topic of conversation lasts them to the hotel. It lasts them into the bar where Mindfang orders herself a cocktail that's got way too much vodka in it and gets Rosa a virgin something or other which she thinks is a pointed jab at her sexual prowess but, no, apparently that just means that it's lacking vodka.

"...Acceptable," Rosa murmurs, after sipping it down. "Very acceptable."

"Even good?" Mindfang asks, raising an eyebrow. "If you think it's good we need to try you on the real thing."

This does not mean the fruit, as Rosa assumes. This means the full-fledged cocktail. There is quite a bit of vodka in that one, as is to be expected of Mindfang. Still, Rosa's not Mindfang and her tolerance isn't nearly as impressive.

Drunk is not the word she'd use to describe her state by the time they're finished. Intoxicated is far more accurate. Rosa's scrambled into her lap, somehow, and has her knees clenched against Mindfang's hips and is kissing her, passionately.

And trying to take her dress off. Mindfang's accepting all of these advances with a grin, but is still stalwartly refusing to allow Rosa to remove her dress.

"Meanie," Rosa snuffles into her ear after she nearly topples to the floor and Mindfang catches her--
then scolds her. "You're mean. Won't even get naked. Just mean."

"You're drunk Rosa." Mindfang laughs, wrinkling up her nose and kissing her between the eyes. "You'd say I was mean even if I knelt down and buried my tongue in your--"

Rosa cuts her off before she can finish her undeniably dirty entendre. "I'm relatively reasonably assuredly assured that you have unquestionably without a doubt gotten me drunk with a deviously dastardly purpose and I'm not entirely quite sure really how I truly feel about this potential situation that may be going on."

"I didn't understand a word of that." Mindfang's staring at her lips with her own mouth parted open. Rosa can hear an ice cube clattering around between her teeth, tongue darting around her teeth like they're a labyrinth.

Rosa finds herself generally wondering what sexual behavior Mindfang is intending on undertaking with that tongue. Why didn't she demand an answer to that question several chapters in her life ago? Damnit all.

"Ugh no one ever listens to me." She mumbles, slipping out of Mindfang's lap to huddle up beneath the bar. Mindfang makes a growling noise and pulls her back up by the nape of her neck.

"You used forty words to say what could be expressed in five-- I did this on purpose." Mindfang holds up her fingers as she enunciates those five words, her eyebrows curled like sarcastic question marks. "No, I'm not going to listen to you. That's 35 wasted words, Rosa--"

"Ohhh yeah let's blame the traumatized quiet woman of talking too much." Rosa teases, leaning forward to kiss her. Mindfang sighs, heavily, and lets her.

** * * *

Mindfang ends up escorting her to bed. That is to say one of the rather kindly footmen asks them to leave the bar as midnight approaches and they sashay along to their suite without any major incident. Except, well, Rosa's slumped in her arms more or less out of her mind from the alcohol.

Drunken Rosa, it seems, doesn't have any qualms about sex. Drunken Rosa wants sex, immediately. And Mindfang's having quite a difficult time getting her to behave.

When Mindfang finally gets her upstairs, she all but throws her onto the bed. Rosa's drunk enough that she simply rolls onto her back and grins.

"Take me, I'm yours," Rosa purrs, draping herself over the bed and Mindfang snorts so she knows she's not doing it right and she tries to contort herself at a better angle until Mindfang rolls her eyes, and sits on the bed beside her.

She allows Rosa to pull her onto the bed and gives her an indulgent smile as she stretches out across the bed and tries her best to bare her breasts. Mindfang lets out a playful growl and Rosa growls back, wrinkling her nose and showing her teeth.

"Ohh you sexy little minx," Mindfang says, her voice low and wicked. She starts to layer her throat with open-mouthed kisses that have a little too much fang and Rosa shivers. She shivers and wraps a leg around Mindfang, pulling her closer.

Mindfang laughs, but she keeps kissing her, dragging her lips up her neck, over her jaw, to her ear where she lingers and lets her fangs sink in to the cartilage. If she's hoping to elicit a frightened reaction she's going about it all wrong because she had twenty seven piercings in that ear at one point
in time and she's not about to become a shrinking violet.

"Not going to cut it." She breathes, reaching up and curling her fingers around Mindfang's jaw. Mindfang arches her neck and moans a little at the touch. Rosa pulls her closer, kissing her softly, and then again and again and again until Mindfang's making frustrated noises.

Rosa turns away, however, every time she goes in to deepen the kiss and soon enough Mindfang has trapped her hands above her head and is biting at her neck, still gently but a little more insistently.

"You're being awfully naughty for someone who wants me to play nice," Mindfang breathes into her ear and she moans, the sound emanating from between her legs and curling up through her lungs into her mouth and echoing through the room. If Mindfang is at all excited by the sound, she doesn't show it and Rosa's frustrated because damnit all what is she doing wrong?

"That's what I thought." Mindfang chuckles against her neck and then, without warning, she swoops in and captures her lips, her fingers curling around her chin. She releases Rosa's hands and she immediately curls her fingers into Mindfang's hair, questing through her thick bundles of curls to find her horns.

Mindfang trills, low and rasping in the depths of her chest. She kisses her even more hungrily and Rosa responds by arching her back and pressing herself as close to Mindfang as she can, until their breasts are pressed together, their hipbones jut together at painful angles and Rosa's clinging to her horns.

Mindfang's tongue is deep within her mouth and Rosa luxuriates in the feel of her making herself perfectly at home, her tongue curling around the points of her molars and the crowns of her eyeteeth and then, finally, her tongue brushing against her tongue. It's sloppy and breathless and absolutely inelegant and Rosa never wants it to end.

But she breaks away to huff: "my idea I'm in charge," with a voice that's shaky despite all the courage the liquor has given her.

"Of course, Pet," Mindfang says sweetly, giving her a warm smile. "Whatever you want."

"You're indulging me," Rosa mutters and Mindfang rolls her eyes and goes in to kiss her once more. She keeps kissing her, even as Rosa mumbles complaints behind Mindfang's lips.

"You have the most delicious pout," Mindfang pants, staring at Rosa at if she's considering a remarkable puzzle. "I could kiss it off your face for years and years."

"I'd prefer for you to have sex with me." Rosa mutters against her lips, frowning and at that Mindfang laughs and Rosa hisses, clawing her away.

"Take me seriously," She insists, frowning. "I want you to take me seriously!"

"Pet, if you were sober we'd be naked and rutting from the moment you'd said 'take me I'm yours'." Mindfang says, rolling her eyes. "Not that we needed that second part--"

"I'm horny." Rosa grumbles, glaring darkly at Mindfang. "And I don't like it at all."

"Well, little one, now you know how I've felt for the past three months." Mindfang says, a little more harshly that Rosa would really like and she lets out a pitiful whine.

She wonders what's the proper sign of submission for this moment and decides she feels better simply muttering, "I'm sorry my morals have inconvenienced you."
"Pet, I don't mind your morals. What I mind is that you only want me to fuck you when you're drunk." Mindfang says with a snorts, but Rosa's highly distracted by a hand slipping beneath the collar of her dress. "Don't push me to change my mind on this one."

Mindfang makes a move to kiss her. Rosa shakes her head aside and Mindfang growls like an angry kitten until she relents and allows herself to be kissed.

"When I was younger I used to have the most deliciously wicked fantasies about pirates you know," Rosa pants between kisses and Mindfang makes a rumbling noise that she's beginning to realize means 'yes, this, I am aroused by this, continues this' so she keeps talking. "I used to imagine I'd be abducted by a swashbuckling adventurer and he'd tie me up ad have his wicked way with me."

"Mmm? Do tell?" Mindfang asks, lathing her collarbone with her tongue before kissing up and down it as if she's testing for something. Rosa shivers into the press of her lips and tongue, stretching her neck out as long as she can so that Mindfang has more ground to cover.

Her breath is warm and her lips are cool and the dichotomy of the two against her skin makes her tremble. She has to force herself to remain still as each brush of Mindfang's lips sends shudders of wonderful frisson down her spine. She's sure that any sort of twitch or jerk away from Mindfang's touch will end this and she doesn't want that now, thank you.

"So far that has yet to happen. I must say I'm very disappointed in your standards." Rosa says, her breath light in her chest and words accented by soft moans and high-pitched gasps.

"The tying up and have the way with doesn't occur until the vestal virgin gives up her virginity while in possession of her full faculties," Mindfang reminds her. She stops kissing her long enough to look at her and smile, predatorily.

"I want that, please," She mumbles quietly and Mindfang snorts, but looks pleased with herself and leans in closer.

As Rosa watches, breathless, she trails her fingers over her breasts, down her ribcage, to her hips where she squeezes, tightly. Her claws dig in just the slightest bit through her dress and Rosa half wants to tell her 'gloves on, clothes off' but she doesn't think Mindfang will listen.

"But the second you've been honorably deflowered, I'll see about the debauchery, shall I? The ropes from our curtains will work quite nicely--" Her words rumble through her ears, the vibrations travelling down her neck and sending a virulent flush into her cheeks and Rosa frantically kisses her once more. Mindfang responds quite nicely until she attempts to slip a hand beneath her shirt and then she pulls back with a scowl.

"I don't think it counts if you're nice about it." Rosa says, still glaring at the fact that she's been foiled. This isn't particularly fair and she doesn't appreciate it. If she's not going to have sex with her, she really shouldn't be kissing her; it's just adding kindling to the hearth and she won't have it.

Except she will because she's desperate to feel Mindfang's skin against her own, separated by nothing at all. She wants to luxuriate in the press of her icy lips against every inch of her, she wants to curl so close that she can hear her heart beating in her chest and wants to memorize every inch of her body--

"Trust me dear, it does." Mindfang purrs, and Rosa giggles, drunkenly, as Mindfang catches her lips once more. Mindfang pulls her bottom lip into her mouth with the points of her fangs and Rosa squeaks, a little, but wraps her fingers around Mindfang's horn once more.
Mindfang gets a little more comfortable on top of her, squeezing her thighs tightly around Rosa's hips and shifting until Rosa's every breath reminds her she has a pirate atop of her.

She tries to shift Mindfang off with a mewl of protest that's not really angry, but pirate doesn't budge and Rosa's suddenly very well aware that she's trapped beneath her Mistress and that she doesn't mind, not at all.

"Ohhh, darling," She breathes, grinning widely and Rosa blushes, jade, across her cheekbones and into her hair. But she preens all the same, hoping to look tempting.

"Look at you, Pet. You look nice down there." Mindfang teases with a curve in her eyebrows that makes Rosa incredibly sure this is something sexual.

"Of course I do," Rosa replies, smugly, and Mindfang looks incredibly startled which is more than enough of a change Rosa needs to reach up and tug her down once more. "I'd look even better naked," Rosa breathes into her ear and Mindfang moans, deep in her chest and Rosa watches, incredibly satisfied with herself, as her cheeks flush.

"Don't tempt me, Pet," Mindfang snarls, and this time when her teeth close down it's for a hard, bite that draws blood. "I am not a patient woman."

"I don't know why--"

"I will kiss you. I will touch you. I will curl against you and very happily watch while you get yourself off but I will not be having sex with you until you're absolutely, stone-cold sober."

"I'm not going to change my mind," She says, sullenly, trying to shift Mindfang but she refuses to move an inch and continues to look steadily more furious as she watches Rosa struggle.

"I don't want you to wake up tomorrow morning and hate me." She says, flatly. "And I don't want you to feel that I took advantage of you."

"I don't--"

"I care about you. Far more than can be healthy, I'm sure," Mindfang grumbles, brushing Rosa's hair off of her heated forehead. She sounds pissed and but she looks sad, incredibly sad. Rosa would like to comfort her but, really, that's not going to help right now. "And it might sound silly, but I'm not going to have you forget a single minute of the first time we make love."

Rosa glares but she relents slightly, trailing her fingers across Mindfang's face. "Fine."

"Fine?"

"Fine." Rosa repeats, shrugging and wrapping her arms around Mindfang's neck. "But I'm mad at you."

"Drunken Rosa is mad at me?" Mindfang asks, in mock surprise, pulling Rosa atop of her. Rosa lets out a delighted trill and goes for her throat once more. "I thought drunken Rosa wanted to get between my legs."

"Drunken Rosa thinks you're sleeping on the couch." Rosa replies, arching her eyebrows.

"...Drunken Rosa is already in trouble for telling the less drunk Mindfang she's not a real pirate for not taking advantage of her and drunk Rosa should really watch what she says if she doesn't want to be locked in a closet."
"Fine." Rosa huffs, pulling the blankets around her and flopping over. "I'm going to sleep."

"I'm really hoping you don't remember any of this in the morning." Mindfang mutters, burrowing down beside her. "Because you're going to be soooooooo embarrassed when you wake up."

***

She is. She's incredibly embarrassed when she wakes up twelve hours later, hungover and unhappy... and still rather horny. Mindfang's sitting at the end of the bed, reading, and Rosa stares at her like she's an angry bear.

"...Don't be mad." Rosa whispers, groaning. "Please don't be mad."

"I'm not. You're kind of a cutie when intoxicated." Mindfang gives her a small smile. "How much do you remember?"

"I want to have sex with you."

"..."

"That's. That's what I remember I mean--" Rosa runs her hands through her hair.

Mindfang sighs a little. "Too much to hope?"

"No. No I still really want to have sex with you. But. I also remember wanting to have sex with you." She rubs at her face. "I-- Um-- I'm sorry for my behavior--"

"That was a quite a bit of vodka for a little girl like you." Mindfang pats her knee. "You silly thing you. Go, take a shower. We've got plans for today."

Rosa nods and then sits up. And then flops back down. She is, to her consternation, not wearing anything.

"...I went to bed fully dressed." Rosa says, slowly, narrowing her eyes. "What did you do with my clothes!?"

Mindfang rolls her eyes and drops her book, clearly expressing that she will not deign to answer that question. She herself is wearing a low-collared nightshirt that buttons up the front, sewn from a worn out cotton-- it looks like a man's shirt that's been worn into soft, comfortable cotton and... well... it's purple.

"Are you wearing one of the Orphaner's shirts in bed with me?" Rosa asks in a voice like death. Mindfang stares at her and then swallows. She quickly puts on her glasses which really does serve to make her look exponentially younger, cuter and harder to punch in the face.

She quickly undoes a few more buttons, exposing more skin, and gives Rosa a soft, glowing smile. "No, of course not dear. How about I get you breakfast?"

Mindfang does not wait for a response, but scrambles off the bed. Rosa decides to shower and, by the time she's done, Mindfang has produced a full breakfast tray and is wearing a nice, color neutral dress.

Wisely, neither of them choose to comment on the events of an hour before. Rosa settles into the couch beside her and Mindfang passes her a book. They read in awkward silence until Mindfang abruptly stands up.
"Fuck it. We want to fuck, you don't like my Kismesis and we're in a beautiful foreign country. Are we going to sit here glaring at each other or--"

"Go have sex?" Rosa asks, a little too cheerfully. Damn. That's awkward. Does she want to have sex with that woman? Yes is the obvious answer, but is she ready for that sort of... intensity? Yes? No? Maybe? Oh dear.

"No. I mean. Sure. I mean no that's not at all romantic we're not having sex at noon just because we feel awkward--" Mindfang's throwing her purse over her shoulder. "C'mon. There's a theater festival and we can go check it out. I hear they're doing a couple of plays you might like."

Rosa drops her book and gives Mindfang a terse smile. Mindfang rolls her eyes and then reaches out to take Rosa's hand, tugging her off the chair.

"Sounds like a plan." Rosa says her voice full of anxiety. "I mean. If you think it is--"

Mindfang screeches, her voice horribly pitched. She pulls a coat on over her dress and points at the door. "I can't do this-- we need to get out in public."

* * *

Mindfang once more leads her through a labyrinth of streets, keeping up a stream of aimless chatter. There's an awkward tension present between them that Rosa doesn't like. She knows where it's coming from and why it's happening, of course, but that doesn't mean she appreciates it.

"You look really pretty today," She says, awkwardly, as they leave the front doors of some historical house where something important happened. "You should, um, wear that color more often."

Mindfang gives her an incredulous stare, her gaze utterly unbelieving. "Blue? Rosa, I wear blue all the time."

Her voice is nothing short of a condemnation. But Rosa swallows her pride and takes her hand, slowly twining their fingers together.

"Yes." She shrugs a little and awkwardly presses her shoulder against Mindfang's. "I'm used to seeing you in black, that's all. You look... happier."

"Says the woman who could be a houseplant she's so depressed?"

"I'm just trying to be nice." Rosa argues, lamely, staring at the ground. "I-- I didn't mean to upset you. Don't be... don't be angry at me for getting drunk and being an idiot."

Mindfang brushes her hair back from her face with an exaggerated huff. Rosa ignores the urge to roll her eyes and without considering it, reaches up with a pair of practiced hands and braids her hair off to one side. To her credit, Mindfang doesn't make a face. She gives her a blank stare instead.

Despite the fact that they're standing in front of a highly trafficked region of town frequented by tourists, she takes a deep breath and decides that something needs to be said. "I... I would... I would like to become intimate with you at some point. And. I'm. I'm rather nervous about it. And I didn't mean to be rude--"

"You accused me of failing at my job because I haven't raped you." She says, flatly, narrowing her eyes. "And then told me that you hated me because I wasn't willing to take advantage of you."

Rosa bites her lip. Yes, she remembers that. "...To be fair the word I used was ravished--"
"Ugh. Just because the connotation is better doesn't make it better." Mindfang argues, making a 'yucky' face. "I want to fuck your brains out, not hurt you."

"I know that. I-- I do. And. I think I was mainly referring to the, um, less traditional aspects of sexual intercourse that are commonly connected to characterizations of pirates in popular culture-- And to be fair, we have had several conversations where it was strongly implied that I'd be tied to a bed--"

"Rosa--" She's trying to cut her off. That can't happen or she'll never say this.

"Also I was incredibly intoxicated and trying to get you grumpy enough to decide to abandon your morals and prove your sexual prowess--"

Mindfang's staring now, her eyes impressively wide. All eight of her pupils are focused on her and Rosa doesn't like the feeling at all. "Rosa--"

"And please don't hate me for behaving like a hormone addled adolescent girl who had too much alcohol because for all intents and purposes I am. I mean-- I was-- I mean--" She's incredibly flustered, now, her face half-hidden behind her hands as she attempts to hide how horribly awkward this is making her feel.

"Rosa shut up no one cares." Mindfang covers her mouth with her hand. "I'm-- I'm not mad at you. I'm a little frustrated but-- well-- I don't want you to think I'm angry at you for not being ready for a physical relationship."

"Oh." Rosa's response is somewhat muffled by her hand. The point still gets across.

"Although, to be fair, if I thought I could pressure you into a physical relationship without you hating me forever... I totally would have fucked your brains out last night."

"...Oh."

"And I don't like knowing that about myself."

"Well. If it's any consolation, I don't think I would be really that upset with you if you had."

"Really now?" Mindfang's eyebrows quirk up and she smiles, slyly. "Do you mean that?"

"I. I don't know. Is it alright with you if I mean that?" Rosa hates herself for how meek she sounds. "I don't know! I've never done this before."

"...Yeah, I'm really glad I didn't have sex with you last night." Mindfang rolls her eyes and steals a kiss, ignoring a few scandalized gasps from the surrounding crowd. "Don't worry so much about it, Pet. We're going to be just fine."

* * *

They spend the day watching bits and pieces of performances until the sun starts to sink and they head back to the hotel. Rosa, it turns out, doesn’t have much of an appreciation for on the street theater festivals. She’s far more preferential to sitting down in a formal theater and watching a performance with actors and lights and fancy costumes--

She would definitely have appreciated it more if she could stop thinking about sex. With Mindfang. In their massive bed. In their hotel. Without alcohol.

Two days in a foreign country and she's lost all of her morals. Still, the thought's in her brain now
and she's desperate to achieve her goal. But Mindfang's so tender with her, so kind and thoughtful--

At least, she has been as of late. Today she seems slightly distracted, a bit more short tempered and more inclined to snap and be unreasonable, only to feel incredibly guilty about it ten minutes later. All in all, it's rather standard behavior and Rosa's glad to see it because-- well-- a grumpy Mindfang is easier to deal with than an overly affectionate, obsequious one.

Eventually, however, things settle back into a cadence that Rosa can feel comfortable with. They flirt, they complain, they growl, the grumble, they have a rather extended conversation about wine-- It's normal, as if they're doing nothing more than pacing the deck of the ship, even though they can only catch glimpses of the ocean instead of seeing it all around them.

Her brain won't stop rushing around every time Mindfang touches her. Mainly, it won't stop rushing around the subject of sex. She wants to stop thinking about it, of course-- but-- well--

It's difficult. And she kind of-- well-- Doesn't mind.

Now that she's perfectly aware that Drunk Rosa wants to have sex... she's open to the idea. Very open to the idea, in fact. The only issue is breaching the subject with her intended sexual partner. Who is Mindfang.

Not that she really needs to elaborate on that fact—Oh dear. This is hard.

By the time dinner rolls around, they've taken shelter in their hotel once more. They spend half the evening half asleep until Mindfang catches sight of the clock and gasps.

"Shit we have dinner reservations," Mindfang says, leaping up off of the couch and making frantic hand gestures. "Oh hell I totally forgot--"

"Do we have to go?" Rosa mumbles, tiredly, giving Mindfang a exhausted stare.

"Oh, come along, Pet," Mindfang murmurs, kissing her cheek. "We're going to have ourselves a nice supper, just the two of us. And it will be lovely and wonderful and we'll both pretend that there's absolutely nothing strange about our relationship for once."

Rosa glances up from staring at the floor and gives her a bemused smile. "What's wrong with our relationship, Mistress?"

"Nothing, I suppose." Mindfang says, after some consideration. "Nothing at all. The romantic in me would prefer, however, that we had a relationship that started over a conversation over a particularly fascinating book instead of, well..."

"Marcus finding me in a slave market and thinking to himself, 'hey, the woman I work for would probably find her attractive?'" Rosa asks, innocently, and Mindfang shrugs as if to say 'so what?' but she doesn't look at all pleased.

"Do you want me to apologize? Do you want me to say that I feel sorry for the way I've treated you? Because I don't. Really."

"...I have no complaints about how I've been treated." Aside from the overbearing possessiveness, the bizarre tendency to lock her in small enclosed spaces and the total asshole for a Kismesis and the whole she's a slave paid for by her weight in gold, that is.

Mindfang seems to predict this line of questioning and grabs her face. "No bad thoughts. I'd probably be a total bitch to you even if I hadn't bought you. Actually, paying for you probably extends your
Rosa gives her a blank stare. Mindfang looks a little sheepish, and kisses her cheek. "C'mon. Go get ready." She mutters. "We're going to be late and I hate being late Rosa, I hate it--"

Rosa glares at her until she shuts up. It's a remarkably effective way to handle things, in her opinion. All the same, she slips into the bathroom and runs herself a bath. If Mindfang is upset by the idea that she's planning on basking instead of rushing in and out of the shower, she certainly doesn't barge in to say anything.

Still, Rosa makes it quick, getting in and out of the water in less than ten minutes. She wraps herself up in one of the towels and, with her entire logical brain rebelling against the idea, steps out into their suite.

Mindfang has dressed in the time that it's taken Rosa to take a bath. It's a remarkable transformation; she's wearing a long royal blue dress and her hair is pinned off of her face for once. She's wearing a ludicrous amount of sapphires and it's clear dressed to impress.

And Rosa knows that she's the one who's meant to impress, which makes everything all the more intimidating. When she finally stops staring at her long enough to pay attention, it's clear what Mindfang's end goal is.

Mindfang's watching her, hungrily, and it doesn't take very much effort to understand what's going through her mind. Rosa feels a flush flare up in her cheekbones and travel up into her hairline, but she preserves her bravado all the same.

"Enjoy the bath, darling?" Mindfang asks, her voice low and mellow as if her eyes aren't attempting to convey a deeper message to her lady parts through Morse code. "You look very content."

She nods. Her fingers tighten around the edge of her towel and she frantically attempts to decide what to do. Does she flirt back or does she not flirt back? Will that be taken as coming on too strong? What if she doesn't? Will Mindfang think she hates her--

"Rosa," Mindfang laughs, grinning widely. "Rosa, Pet, it's not a philosophical question, don't look so worried!"

The correct response to this is to laugh a little and give Mindfang a smile, to pad over to her and sink onto the couch beside her. All she manages is a shaky laugh and a nervous noise.

Mindfang gives her a questioning look but, thankfully, doesn't question her behavior. She simply nods towards the clock on the wall and makes a 'hurry up' gesture. "We've got dinner reservations in about two quarters of an hour and it's a bit of a walk."

"...Two quarters?" Rosa asks, laughing a little. Some of the tension slips out of her shoulders and she starts over to the closet. She leaves a trail of damp footprints behind her on the marble and she starts to fret over whether or not someone will slip, until she's confronted with the far more troubling issue of what in the hell to wear.

"You've bought me too many clothes." She grumbles and then, all of a sudden, there's arms sneaking around her waist. Rosa yelps and twitches and--

"I know. Such a shame when you look your best as naked as the day your lusus took you home."

Mindfang sighs, melodramatically, and her lips start to make their way down to her breasts. Rosa's about to slap her away when she continues. "Perhaps it's because I want to spend my time enjoying your company instead of with my lips pressed to your skin."
"Do you really?" Rosa murmurs. "Truly, is that what you want?"

"Darling, I've waited this long before actively attempting to consummate our relationship. If I didn't like talking to you, why in the hell would I have put up with that?" Mindfang huffs, rolling her eyes. "And you were such a little tease. Honestly. Always draping yourself all over the place and flirting and kissing like you took lessons--"

"Davina." Rosa says, simply, and Mindfang pretends very hard that she didn't say that.

"--And to top it all off, I got to listen to you talk for days upon days and knew every night I'd come back to you whispering to me across my pillow. So don't you start getting shy on me now, Rosa." Mindfang mutters, kissing her jaw just beside her lips. "Now that I've had the pleasure of feeling your skin beneath mine and watching you tremble beneath me, don't you dare get shy."

"...You like talking to me?"

"I don't keep anyone on my ship that I can't talk to for six hours at a time without getting bored and I certainly don't allow anyone in my bed if I can't talk to them for at least six weeks at a time."

Mindfang kisses her, this time managing to capture her lips instead of impressively missing the mark. Rosa smiles against the kiss. "How could I ever talk for that long when you simply refuse to shut up?"

"Well, you see Pet," Mindfang whispers, her voice devious and low enough that Rosa's instantly weak at the knees from hearing it. "That's what sex is for."

"You can still talk while you're having sex--"

"Some ways, yes," Mindfang huffs, apparently put out at the perceived slight on her sexual abilities. "But there's more than one way to make a virgin moan."

"You mean to say 'skin a cat'." Rosa tells her, awkwardly.

"There's a lot of things I'd like to do to your cat." Mindfang mutters under her breath and Rosa's reasonably sure that's meant to be sexual but--

"I don't understand that reference." She sniffs, shaking her still-damp hair out of her eyes. "But I suspect it's in poor taste and I won't even deign to ask what you mean."

"Damnit Rosa."

* * *

Mindfang picks out her dress. It's a gorgeous green silk gown in a beautiful, rich green that's the color of grass in early autumn; a rich, healthy dark green that makes Rosa's skin glint a warm golden gray.

She puts it on as slowly as she can in order to marvel the elegance of the fabric slipping over her skin. It's got a low cut, draping neckline that gives her the illusion of having something to fill the bodice and the back is so low it doesn't exist. She runs her fingers through her hair to flatten it and, without inquiring, helps herself to Mindfang's impressive stock of cosmetics; eyeliner, lipstick, everything she needs to look like she's more than a putrefied corpse.

In her ears are the diamonds she'd unearthed in Mindfang's suitcase and a line of emerald studs go up the piercings in her right ear. She isn't sure how a series of emerald earrings ended up in Mindfang's
jewelry box, but they were there and now they're hers. The holes in her ear aren't at all hard to reopen with the aid of the needle in the hotel's sewing kit and she puts them in without questioning it.

It's rather nice not to be so scattered; to feel as if she's at the helm of her own life for this moment in time and-- well-- it's lovely.

When she looks at herself in the mirror, she can hardly recognize herself. She looks elegant. Elegant and beautiful and *womanly*. For the first time in decades she feels like she's pretty-- like she's someone worth Mindfang's attention.

She smiles at herself and stands a little taller, trying to admire the line of her own back and the jut of her shoulder blades. Her feet fit rather perfectly in Mindfang's heels, and she finds the one gold pair her Mistress owns and steps into them.

Pretty. Yes, she feels pretty. Attractive, too, as if she's capable of making anyone at all fall in love with her, from the Empress to the lowest of bloods. Not that any of those things matter, mind you, but in a world that's been enslaved to the idea of a hemospectrum for so many years it's hard to break habits.

Her ego is only bolstered when she slips out of their suite to meet Mindfang in the lobby. Everyone she passes stares at her and, while she'd usually assume that was due to her status as a failed revolutionary, tonight she's more than readily able to believe they're marveling at her.

Mindfang is, of course, sitting one of the many armchairs with a book open in her lap. She's wearing sapphires around her neck and wrists and her luxuriant hair is piled up at the base of her neck with just a few rebellious tendrils falling around her cheeks.

There's a bottle of wine open beside her and Rosa can see a ring of ruby lipstick on its rim. She sinks onto the couch placed at the junction of her armchair and the end table and rests her elbow on its arm. She doesn't make a sound and, therefore, it isn't at all surprising that Mindfang doesn't glance up to see who's sitting beside her.

Without asking, she picks up her wineglass and sips from it, delicately, careful not to smudge her own lipstick. It's a white wine, which she's rather pleased with, and tastes like an entire orchard on her palette.

Mindfang still hasn't noticed her by the time she's finished the glass.

"That must be a rather enthralling read." Rosa murmurs, voice low and soft. Mindfang twitches a little and Rosa sees her frown. When she glances up, it's with a look that's not nearly friendly.

"Can I help you?" She asks, quietly, raising her eyebrows.

"...I thought we had dinner plans? I'm rather sad to think that the pickings of a hotel's meager collection is enough to win first place in your affections."

Mindfang stares at her. The book slips from her hands and she doesn't make a move to pick it up. Rosa gives her a sly smile, curling her fingers around her neck in an attempt to avoid the inevitable blush.

"Rosa, Pet," She breathes, eyes going wide. All eight pupils dilate, suddenly, and she sucks in a breath through her nose. "Rosa--" Mindfang repeats.

"At a loss for words, are we?" She says, cheerfully, reaching out and tucking a lock of hair behind her ear. "I'm shocked. Who are you and what in the world have you done with my Mistress?"
Mindfang laughs. Her comments have the effect of snapping her out of her reverie and she reaches out to take her hand. Staring in Rosa's eyes the entire time, she pulls her hand to her lips and kisses her knuckles softly.

"You are divine." Mindfang moans, her face utterly open and, somehow, bizarrely welcoming. "Rosa, love--"

"I clean up nice, don't I?" She chuckles, leaning in close and all but pressing her lips to her ear. "Are you pleased?" She purrs, feeling Mindfang's hair flutter away from her in the breeze off her breath.

"Nnnrgh." She manages in an extremely eloquent fashion. "Darling girl you're gorgeous."

Rosa grins and then bumps their foreheads together, staring into Mindfang's eyes. "I aim to please."

She grins back, her eyes bright and entranced. "I cannot wait to show you off."

They leave the hotel for the restaurant at a leisurely pace. Mindfang's dress, a breezy blue chiffon, billows out around her in a way that seems heartrendingly romantic; the sun is setting, the air is balmy and everywhere around them is the smell of flowers at their best bouquet and the sound of nightingales singing.

Mindfang offers her an arm the moment they start off down the cobblestone streets. Rosa takes it, willingly, resting her head on her shoulder. Mindfang takes up the flow of the conversation, talking about everything and nothing. It's a beautiful sound, her voice mellifluous and almost hypnotizing.

She's talking about the architecture of the city, the way the windows were made, how the carvings were done and what region the stone bricks that make up the city walls came from. It's all fascinating to hear, but Rosa can't help but drift.

"Are you ignoring me, Pet?" Mindfang murmurs with a laugh when Rosa jolts upright off of her shoulder and gives her an innocent stare.

"Byzantine tiling on the church's portico?" She says, guiltily. "Or something about marble?"

Mindfang kisses her. Kisses her softly, their lips pressing together like the tips of their fingers as they cling to one another's hands. It doesn't matter that they're in public, that they're halfway across a Piazza and surrounded by hundreds-- she kisses her.

"I love you, you know." Mindfang murmurs, then begins talking about granite cobblestones outside of the Capital building in the center of the square as if she said nothing at all.

Rosa wants to freeze. She wants to stop in her tracks and stare at her, to cry, to feel some sort of overwhelming emotion, but all she feels is a prickle of something that she doesn't understand anymore--

Is it love? She ponders that for a moment. Is she in love with this paragon of femininity standing beside her? She isn't sure. She wants to be, though.

And that's good enough.

Mindfang leads her down a twisting labyrinth of streets, shadowy and bright in turn. They're light by the sunset, by flickering streetlamps that still use real fire and by stores with glass fronts who's electric lights cast stark shadows onto the cobblestones.

Eventually, though, they make their way to a little restaurant that's set away from the crowd. When
Mindfang opens the door, the place is absolutely breathtaking. It's small yet formal and they have a
table out on a terrace that overlooks the sea. They are, thankfully, the only ones out there, and Rosa
somehow manages to relax despite the nerves fluttering in her stomach.

They end up having a rather lovely dinner, complete with several courses and not very much wine
which is, in and of itself, remarkable, but Rosa's reasonably sure the two of them are working
towards the same goal and chooses not to comment on it.

Neither of them ask any questions that will bring up awkward subjects such as Mindfang's terrible
choice in men or Rosa's crippling survivor's guilt; they don't talk about politics or ethics or even
current events. They sit there and talk about art, books, music, travelling, the ship back in its berth--

It's nice. It's incredibly nice, in fact. Like they're a couple. But, perhaps they are so, well, she doesn't
complain. By the time the dessert course rolls around, she's absolutely at ease and ready to make her
move.

She's thought about it and-- well-- she's never going to stop thinking about it until she tries again.
And she's sober. And Mindfang looks beautiful. And-- well--

She wants to have sex with her. Tonight.

They're holding hands when they walk back onto the hotel grounds. Not snuggled up, not kissing,
not stumbling along drunk, but holding hands and strolling along.

Only a few other couples are out in the hotel garden. Mindfang makes a move that she wants to sit
with them, or, well, sit somewhere alone out there beneath a magnolia tree and flirt for hours and
hours--

She doesn't want to do that. She doesn't want to do that at all. While this would normally be an
incredibly wonderful idea-- a romantic night under the stars in a perfumed garden beside a fountain,
kissing Mindfang until the sun rises--

But that's not what she'd planned on doing this evening. This evening she has far more important
plans, plans that involve not very much clothing and-- and--- touching? and--- kissing, she assumes?
She's read more than her share of erotic literature but that's only so reliable--

Oh screw it. She wants to have sex with her. That's all. No more, no less, she just wants to have sex
with her and enjoy herself utterly. It's just a matter of discovering how to make this desire known in a
way that won't slay her from sheer embarrassment.

So she mumbles, quietly, in Mindfang's ear: "I'm tired."

Mindfang accepts this news with a hefty sigh, rolling her eyes up into the back of her skull. She
clearly has a better idea in mind than going to bed after a long romantic night. She makes an attempt
to refuse, of course, by tugging her towards one of the benches.

But Rosa yawns enough that Mindfang gives her a concerned stare. She does her best to make her
face look completely pitiful and sleepy-- somehow irresistible to Mindfang's growing inability to be
charmed. Mindfang hesitates a little bit, her fingers almost slipping through Rosa's, but she sighs all
the same and manages a tight little smile that's showing more than a little bit of her frustration.

"Are you sleepy, my Pet?" Mindfang murmurs, with an affectionate affect to her voice. She reaches
out and brushes Rosa's hair behind her ear and she squalls, shaking it back out to flop around before
her eyes. "Are you ready for bed?"
Rosa nods. She nods for a painfully long period of time, head bobbing up and down until Mindfang gives her a bizarre look and begins to nod herself. They nod at each other for a full minute before Mindfang snorts and grabs either side of her face to still her.

"Rosa, you're being really fucking weird." Mindfang mutters, rolling her eyes. "What crawled up your nook and bit you?"

"I want to go to bed," She says, quietly, her voice timid and coming out at the absolute wrong pitch. "Please."

Mindfang gives her another tight smile that doesn't quite reach her eyes. "Of course. Let's get you asleep before you start speaking in tongues."

Damnit. This is difficult. This is very difficult. What does she have to do? Say, "HEY, let's have sex"? She tried that last night. Mindfang ended up sleeping on the floor in the hallway and Rosa ended up furious at her. And they still didn't have sex.

"I don't want to go to sleep." She says, even more quietly than before. "I want to go to bed."

"...Rosa?" Mindfang asks, a little incredulously, and her eyes widen a bit as she takes the time to process this. It's not that hard, really. Not at all. If she would just exert the brainpower to forge the connection, that is. "Darling?"

"With you. Upstairs. Just you. You and I." Rosa murmurs in an attempt to make it wholly clear what she's attempting to get at. Mindfang stares at her for a little longer and her face goes slack.

Before Rosa can feel good or bad about this fact, she's being hauled up over Mindfang's shoulder. It's not an unfamiliar posture but the fact that her hand has snuck up the hem of her dress to grip her inner thigh like it's a handle.

The concierge makes a strangled noise but remains utterly composed and wishes them a goodnight. The rest of the couples in the elevator do the same... after Rosa smiles at them and murmurs, 'just turned my ankle a bit, we're fine'.

"Why didn't you take the stairs?" Rosa mutters from over Mindfang's shoulder as the elevator stops at every floor to let other hotel guests on and off. "This was a far better idea in theory than in actuality."

"Shut up Rosa," Mindfang mutters, darkly, squeezing her ass hard. "You made me wait three fucking months for this, don't ask me to wait much longer."

It's a valid point. So she doesn't say anything more.

* * *

Mindfang sets her on the bed like she's a china doll instead of throwing her down and tackling her like she expected. Rosa perches on the edge of the bed, shaking just a little with nerves.

"Okay." Mindfang says, straightening slowly, gown flourishing around her. "Okay. Okay."

"You said that." Rosa reminds her, softly, her voice still absolutely quivery. "What's okay?"

Mindfang's looking at her, eyes wide and excited. She looks like a young child who's just been told it's her birthday. Except her birthday includes a lot of sex rather than cake and-- um-- well-- Rosa's never had a birthday party so she's not entirely sure what it should entail instead of sex. Perhaps
bringing young children into this was a bad idea when she's really just a woman getting what she's lusted after for what seems to be an unbearably long time.

"We're going to have sex. And we're going to pretend for a little while that you can say whatever you want and push me around if you're not happy with what I'm doing." She says, firmly, frowning darkly at her.

Rosa laughs. But Mindfang doesn't.

"Rosa I need to know you're not going to be afraid to tell me no." Mindfang glares.

So Rosa gives her a nod and says, firmly as she can: "Understood."

Mindfang kisses her on the cheek and then, to Rosa's surprise, gets to her feet and begins to bustle around the room. She locks the door, she draws the curtains, she banks the fire low-- Rosa watches her, more than a little nervously because while it makes sense to make sure they won't be interrupted... it's bizarre to realize that preparations go into this sort of encounter. It makes her painfully aware how inexperienced she is and her bravado begins to cower.

Her dress, sewn from a beautiful blue satin and designed for high society, is creased and more than a little silly looking given that they're about to have some (hopefully) passionate sex. Despite the inappropriateness of her attire, however, she looks downright regal; her hair is still pinned up, curls arranged at the crown of her head with sapphire pins that sparkle in the dying light of the fire. Jewels hang around her neck and wrists and Rosa can't help but wonder what in the world she'd look like in nothing but those sapphires.

Not that she needs to imagine as she's probably going to find out quite soon. Mindfang slips out of her dress with out preamble, leaving it on the floor. She keeps her slip on, thankfully, because Rosa's not sure she could handle anything more at the moment. Mindfang sashays over her, slowly, in a gleam of blues as rich as the sky reflected on the ocean's face.

"Pet, are you paying attention to me?" Mindfang breathes, running the back of her hand down Rosa's cheek. She shivers into the touch and makes a noise that's wholly foreign to her ears, a brilliant warble that makes Mindfang's pupils-- all eight of them-- widen.

"Yes, Mistress," She says, eyes wide and voice barely above a whisper. Her eyes are wide with anticipation and the rest of her is beginning to melt into the bed as her limbs forget how to remain stiff.

"Are you ready to get started?" Mindfang asks her, calmly. Rosa nods.

Mindfang's shockingly gentle with her. Well, to be quite frank, she was expecting her to be gentle. She had promised that much during their one blatant conversation about this sort of thing. But it's still surprising. She seems like she'd be quite passionate, not calm and measured. But she's taking her sweet time and Rosa's not sure she likes it. She kneels down beside the bed, fingers moving slowly up and down her leg.

"If you get at all uncomfortable, my love," She says, quietly, hands still lingering around Rosa's knees-- her face and voice warm yet serious, "You will let me know, hmm? Anything at all. And if you need me to stop, I will stop."

Rosa nods, nods. She's nervous, incredibly nervous. She doesn't know what to expect at all. Will it be anything like kissing her? Will the sensations be the same? Will she be able to handle it? What if-- what if Mindfang doesn't like her. What if she does something wrong--
"Are you sure you want to do this, Pet?" Mindfang asks, softly, squeezing her hands. "You don't look quite sure--"

"I'm sure." She says, as confidently as she can with a whisper. "I want you. I want this."

"...Promise me, Pet, that you'll be vocal with me or we're not going to do this."

"I promise, Mistress." She says, turning her wrists to squeeze her hands in return. "I'll let you know if I'm in any discomfort."

"No. No that's not what I said," She grumbles with a bit of a frown. "If you need me to slow down, if you like something-- if there's anything at all, you will let me know."

She reaches forward and brushes her curls behind her ears. Mindfang nuzzles into the touch, trailing her lips over the palm of her hand. "...Yes, Mistress. Of course."

"Thank you, darling." Mindfang says, smiling. "Now, are we... ready to get things started?"

Rosa nods. This isn't at all how she envisioned her first sexual encounter to develop. Not at all. She'd been hoping for quite a bit more romance, and perhaps a little bit of impulsivity--

And then Mindfang's lips make contact with her wrist. It's shocking how much of a jolt it gives her, a shiver spreading up her spine. Her lips move up her arm as she crawls up onto the bed, lipstick smudging and providing and scintillating resistance against her skin instead of gliding softly like she'd expected. Her skin twitches beneath every press of her lips, shuddering away and then darting back into place. When Mindfang meets her elbow she nips down ever so slightly, her teeth pinching the skin instead of sinking in.

Mindfang is moving slowly, very slowly, and her eyes are constantly trained on Rosa's face. Rosa can't look at her, because meeting her eyes is too much effort. Instead she stares down at Mindfang's lips, and the way her lipstick has painted her skin.

"You're beautiful," Mindfang murmurs when she pulls away, regretfully. "Look at you, my dove, just look at you."

"Thank you, Mistress," She breathes, blushing a little

"May I undress you?" Mindfang asks, in a voice that soft and neutral, trailing her fingers up and down Rosa's thigh.

"Yes." She says, hesitantly. A little too hesitantly, perhaps, because Mindfang looks up at her with a questioning stare. "Yes," She says, more firmly.

"Thank you, Pet," Mindfang says, laughing a little. She looks beautiful when she laughs, Rosa realizes, absolutely beautiful. Her face goes warm and soft and kissable-- it's really absolutely wonderful. "It's an honor to finally do this."

Rosa wishes she wasn't serious but, well, she's horribly convinced that she is. She sounds like she is. Rosa makes a nervous noise but Mindfang kisses her.

Kisses her until she's unable to remember why she'd ever even consider not doing this because, well, her body is begging for her to pay attention to the fact that she needs to have sex, now. Mindfang bites at her tongue a little, bites at her lip a little, bites at her cheeks a little-- she kisses her roughly, to say the least.
Rosa kisses her back just as desperately, except without letting go of the blankets beneath her hands. Mindfang isn't clinging to anything so she's free to take Rosa by the throat and pull her face closer until their noses brush and their foreheads slam together--

It's a mess but it makes her feel better, far far better and makes her nerves settle down. Rosa inhales the full aroma of Mindfang's perfume and the strange headiness of pheromones.

"I really want to rip your clothes off now," Mindfang breathes, breaking off the kiss with a slow, drawn out moan that's clearly fake but Rosa flushes all the same.

Mindfang sees this and makes a triumphant sound before setting back to work. She kneels down before her and starts to work.

She undresses her slowly, hands moving with the alacrity of an archivist handling the oldest of manuscripts. Mindfang starts with her shoes, slipping them off her feet and shoving them, carefully, under the bed.

"Look at that, I'm rubbing off on you." Rosa teases and Mindfang grins up at her. Rosa reaches out and runs a thumb over the arch of her cheekbones and the cut of her jaw. It's the first time she's touched her and her fingers jolt, nervously.

Mindfang shudders into the touch and moans. She moans beautifully, like a cello who's strings are being manipulated not quite exactly, but enough to produce a noise that's only a few degrees away from aurally pleasing. It's nice to hear and it's even nice to see the look of utter delight blossoming across her face.

Her stockings come down next, slowly slipping over her skin like velvet. Mindfang undoes the hooks on her garter belt with shocking dexterity, given the fact that she can't see what she's doing at all in the darkness, and Rosa lets out a small, nervous laugh at just what that implies. Mindfang kisses the back of her knee in way of acknowledging her fear.

She feels her body begin to go absolutely slack and begins to find it hard to focus on remaining composed because oh dear heavens that's amazing. There's so many things to be felt, to be paid attention to; so many sensations that are demanding attention in a rush that's overwhelming her.

The main factor at play is that Mindfang isn't wearing her gloves and-- well-- it's amazing to think Mindfang's skin is against her skin, touching her in places no one's touched her before. The room is warm and utterly humid and her breath comes in with heavy gasps.

The press of Mindfang's fingertips against her thighs is scintillating. She lets out a soft, breathless sigh and gives her a shaky smile. Mindfang tosses her stockings over her shoulder in a needlessly melodramatic fashion before eyeing her with a wicked smirk and murmuring:

"Shall we, darling?"

And with a smile that shows more confidence than she feels, she says, softly: "Of course, Marquise."

She wrinkles her nose at the title but gets up, slowly, and bends over her. Rosa's breath catches a little in her throat and she leans forward enough that their lips brush. Mindfang moves closer, close enough to make it a legitimate kiss. Their fangs click together and it's Rosa, this time, who slips her tongue inside her mouth and carefully explores the back of her teeth, the roughness of her tongue, the places on the inside of her cheek that are scarred over from god knows what.

Mindfang hums, happily and then she's once more on the bed beside, leaning against Rosa's back and wrapping her arms around her. Her breasts press into her spine with enough pressure to remind
her that Mindfang very much a woman. Rosa turns her head to continue the kiss and it's difficult but, well, it's worth it because it turns out that it's far easier to kiss when you tilt your head at just the right angle.

"May I?" She asks with a soft smile, and her rings click against the buttons going down her back. Rosa nods, and with a jolt she realizes, oh god, that Mindfang's lowering her lips to her neck. She kisses the nape of her neck, softly, brushing her scant hair away from her spine.

Her fingers undo the first button. Lips touch her exposed skin. She undoes the second button- same thing. She's beginning to sense a pattern and Rosa finds herself shuddering as she it starts to dawn on her just how much skin on skin contact she's been missing. The trembling is ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. She feels like she's a leaf in the wind, arching her back into the touch of Mindfang's lips against her vertebrae.

She's beginning to feel immensely aroused by all of this. It's intimidating and almost overwhelming but she forces herself not to panic over it, to take a deep breath and just... go along for the ride. Mindfang's arms wrap around her waist once more and she can feel the press of her ridiculously silky dress against her back.

Still around her like a snake, Mindfang curls her head around her shoulder to nibble along her collarbone. It feels good to be embraced so tightly. It would feel amazing to get her naked right about now.

Is that okay to say? Damn. She doesn't know.

"Darling?" Mindfang murmurs, softly, kissing her throat. "Darling, are you still with me?"

"Yes, Mistress--"

"Can you-- Can you not?" Mindfang asks, quietly, her voice shaking. "Rosa. I just-- I know that we have a... complicated relationship but-- I just-- can we pretend, tonight, that we're just two women?"

"Instead of two women?" Rosa says, dryly. Mindfang whines a little and she relents. "Vienna, you can't pretend that there isn't a power discrepancy--"

"I know. But if I remember that it feels like I'm-- I'm--" She sounds scared. Weirdly scared and Rosa feels her own courage start to quaver but-- perhaps-- perhaps she should feel a little comforted by this fact.

"Taking advantage of me?" She supplies, softly, reaching up and running her fingers through her hair. "You're not. I promise."

"Okay." Mindfang says, softly, squeezing her tightly. "Do you want me to keep going?"

"Yes," Rosa breathes, feeling her fingers ghost down the length of her spine. "Mmmm oh heavens yes."

Mindfang chuckles. It's a nervous chuckle but it's a chuckle all the same. She starts to work at the buttons going down her back in earnest now, instead of nibbling at her skin and she only makes it through two more of them before cursing.

Damn you, you little minx." She snarls and teeth make sharp contact with her shoulder. Rosa trills, anxiously, and Mindfang almost immediately lathes the wound with her shockingly dexterous tongue. It's clearly the only apology she'll get so she accepts it.
"Why the fuck did you have to pick today to dress like an old fashioned governess, I ask you--" Mindfang's talking just to hear her own voice and Rosa hears a bit of an anxious quaver to it.

"There's only thirty of them, you've got five done," Rosa reasons, but Mindfang growls at her and squeezes her knees around Rosa's hips.

She absently reaches up and strokes Mindfang's hair. It's still pinned up and she can feel the facets of the sapphire jewels hidden within in her curls and their cool texture gives her the presence of mind to breathe once more.

"Rip it." Rosa breathes, not entirely sure where the words are coming from. "Rip it off."

"...What?"

"I said, rip the bloody thing off." Rosa snaps, fidgeting a little and shifting anxiously on her knees. Mindfang's fingers go tense on her back but, before Rosa can retract her statement, she's ripping the dress down its back. The buttons pop off and fly across the room.

Mindfang makes a blissful noise. Rosa winces. But her hands run over her back, knuckles kneading into the spaces between her vertebra to soothe the hurt and Rosa keens.

"Can I keep going?" Mindfang asks her, still hidden behind her like an overly friendly shadow. A shadow that's going to get her off. "Or do I need to stop--"

"If you're going to ask me before you do everything we'll be here all night."

"That's fine. There is literally nothing else in the world I find worth doing at this particular moment other than fucking you."

"No pressure, then?" Rosa asks, turning to face her. She looks happier than Rosa's ever seen her-- so much younger with her hair off of her shoulders and neck and her face vividly alive with the challenge of bedding her.

"No, not at all." Mindfang helps her pull her arms out of the dress, guiding the straps down her shoulders like they're her ship heading into port. "If things go wrong, I can always ask for a refund. Thank heavens I kept the receipt."

It takes Rosa a few seconds to process this and, to her surprise, starts to giggle. Mindfang laughs as well, nuzzling into her neck and allowing her face to linger. Her chin notches in perfectly against her collarbone and her cheek is breathtakingly cold against the warm flesh of her throat.

Somehow she manages to get her out of her dress and tosses it on the floor. Rosa, for once, doesn't make a move to retrieve it. She might be rubbing off on her but, well-- even she knows it's a faux paus to pause sex to demand your partner hangs up your discarded clothing.

Mindfang reaches around her and curls her arms beneath her breasts, embracing her. She squeezes her tightly, fingers tickling against her ribcage until Rosa's squirming against her, ass pressed into Mindfang's hips behind her.

She can feel the firmness of her breasts even more strongly, and between them and the cool warmth of her body everything's going straight to her head. Or, rather, between her legs.

"Almost there." Mindfang whispers into her ear, kissing her just beneath her ear and then, in a move that makes Rosa quiver, sinks her fangs into her earlobe. Damnit getting aroused by biting is never a good thing unless it's her teeth going int someone else's flesh--
"Do you want me to finish?" Mindfang asks her, nuzzling through her hair. "Or are you going to take the lead?"

"You seem to be doing a half-decent job." Rosa murmurs, unwilling to admit she's rather enjoying being spoiled like this. There's something incredibly intimate about being undressed slowly, beyond the obvious of course, something that makes her feel a little less shaky and just a little less terrified that Mindfang's about to see her naked. "I suppose you can continue."

Mindfang laughs. And then, of course, of course she goes ahead and rips off her bustier like it's nothing, like that wasn't expensive and made from some rather exquisite venetian lace--

"I said you could rip the dress because we can fix the dress, buttons can be sewn back on-- you just-- I mean-- damnit Vienna--"

Her diatribe is cut short when Mindfang lunges like a particularly hungry cobra, twisting around her in a move that should really cause her to fall off the bed but instead she falls on top of her, shoving her against the mattress. Rosa falls without too much preamble because, well, she's being pinned to the bed by a really hot pirate what in the world does she have to complain about--

"If you pull out a switchblade and cut off my underwear I will not be pleased--"

In a gesture born either of not wanting to listen to her or being worried about the moment being ruined, Mindfang kisses her. Rosa reaches up and knits her fingers behind her Mistress's neck and pulls her closer, seeking to urge her along. Mindfang resists, however, kissing her only until Rosa's heart stops pounding at a thousand beats per minute and she's able to breathe properly again.

"Fuck, Rosa, I don't know how much longer I can act like a civilized being." She pants into her ear when she breaks away. "I need to look at you."

"No." Rosa begs, her voice hitching and tearing on her own fear. "Please, Mistress--"

"Yes, yes you have to let me look." Mindfang groans, the sound more than a little reminiscent of a ship's distress call as it sails into an iceberg, catches fire, sinks to the bottom of the ocean and causes the death of hundreds. Or at least that's how melodramatic she sounds as she complains.

So Rosa squeezes her eyes shut and screws up her face. She digs her fingers into the sheets on either side of her, hands fisted so tightly that they begin to cramp.

"Don't be such a prude," Mindfang mutters, laughing a little and nuzzling the arch of her throat. "It's not like this is the first time I've seen you... fully bared."

"It's the first time you can take a good look and not seem like an utterly terrible person." She mutters, still refusing to open her eyes and refusing to lift her hips off the bed so Mindfang can divest her of her underwear like the fingers around Rosa's hips are insisting she do.

Mindfang hums in agreement. It takes a few seconds for her to reach out and touch her. Even though Rosa's prepared she still lets out a short 'oh!' when she feels the faintest trace of fingers tracing the outline of her figure, curling around the sides of her breasts, down across her ribcage to her waist to the modest flare of her hips.

"You're exquisite--"

"Can we not comment upon my appearance?" Rosa asks, as calmly as she can but her voice cracks before the sentence finishes. "Please, Mistress?"
Mindfang glances up from her rather single-minded observation of her breasts to give her a quizzical stare. She's still dressed—dressed in her gorgeous lingerie, but still dressed—and Rosa's lying beneath her almost naked on top of the sheets, with silk beneath her and Mindfang's warm skin above her.

She looks gorgeous, even if Rosa can see all the blue-tinted scars that run cross her body like ripples in the sand just below the surf. Mindfang’s a fighter and each one of the scares are a mark of distinction that causes her to wear her skin like it's a mantle of ermine.

It's nothing more than a fancy way of saying she's grown into her skin and she knows every inch of herself and is glad to call her body her own. Rosa's not sure she feels the same about herself. Perhaps saying 'not sure' is a gross understatement—she does not feel the same about herself.

"Why not?" Mindfang asks her, wryly, arching an eyebrow. "Do you suddenly think I'm going to become critical now that you're naked beneath me?"

"Yes."

Mindfang snorts, rolling her eyes and making a head gesture that would normally accompany a curtain of black curls fluttering over her shoulder. Except, well, because she has all of her hair pinned up, she just looks like an idiot and makes a squawk that seems to indicate she may have pulled a neck muscle.

But she gives Rosa a bemused smirk all the same, tracing her fingertips up and down the soft, unscarred flesh of her inner arm. Rosa shiver a little and refuses to give Mindfang the benefit of hearing her moan.

Mindfang doesn't seem like the kind of woman who needs positive reinforcement for anything but correcting a problem. Or should she be letting her know when she likes something? How does this work—

She's going to start crying if Mindfang doesn't tell her what in the world she's meant to be doing right now.

Her lack of response is clearly not what Mindfang was looking for because she gives Rosa a tense smile. "Oh, yeah, I'm totally going to jeopardize my chances of getting laid by telling you that your boobs look funny."

"What!?" Rosa squalls, giving her a hurt stare and immediately covering her breasts with her hands.

"JOKE. THAT WAS A JOKE." Mindfang grabs her hands and pulls them above her head, her fangs bared. "Rosa, darling you're beautiful--"

"Not compared to you."

"Ugh don't start that, Pet, don't start that." Mindfang rolls her eyes and sits back onto her heels. Rosa watches her breasts shift within her bustier and feels herself shiver a little.

Mindfang is giving her an imperious stare. She doesn't look like a pirate queen right about now. She looks like a regular queen, covered in jewels and gleaming like a lighthouse over a darkened sea. "I'm going to look at every inch of you, I'm going to touch every inch of you and I'm going to admire all of you from the points of your horns to the prints of your toes."

"But I don't--"

"We're going to have sex. If I didn't find you exhilaratingly attractive I wouldn't have waited for
three fucking months and then some." Mindfang grasps her by the hips, digging her fingers into her skin. She stares at her.

Without further preamble, she reaches behind herself and undoes her bra. Rosa lets out a noise that she can't quite understand when she hears it come out of her mouth because oh goodness is that wonderful to see--

Getting her bra off is apparently too much of a task to perform while pinning Rosa to the bed because, with a curse, she lets her go.

And then Mindfang's flopping off the bed, fighting with her underwear until she manages to kick them off. It's fascinating to watch and still bizarrely arousing. She looks like a panther that's inhaled quite a bit of illegal drugs and then washed them down with a bottle of champagne.

Rosa laughs, despite the fact that she's insatiably turned on by the sight of a naked Mindfang. She's got incredibly muscle tone and has a body that reminds Rosa she's got the physical strength to haul herself up a mast in minutes but her figure is still incredibly lush; she has gorgeous breasts and round hips and a wasp-thin waist-- she might be in excellent physical shape but, well, there's still some weight to her that makes her body look like it's begging for attention.

Her beauty, however, is somewhat allayed by how ridiculous she looks trying to undress herself. Bent over as she is, Rosa can see the flesh of her thighs press together and watch her breasts swing back and forth in an incredibly tantalizing series of motions.

Laughing at Mindfang is a terrible idea, it turns out. Mostly because by the time she's done swearing at her clothing and looking rather silly, she is very naked and tackling her. Rosa squeals and immediately attempts to shove her away but-- well- their skin presses together in a way that's wholly, utterly, sensationally new and Rosa ends up staring at her, face flushing, pupils dilating and chest heaving--

Mindfang scrambles atop of her, placing her knees to either side of her hips and sitting back onto her heels in her usual sphinx like posture.

She runs her hands down Rosa's chest, fingertips lagging against her skin and brushing over her breasts and ribs like Mindfang's playing a xylophone. Rosa's too busy staring up at her to acknowledge any of this, or feel any sort of shame about how near Mindfang's hands are to her breasts.

It would be unfair to say that she looks pleased with herself. She looks downright delighted with herself, smug and perfectly self-possessed and exactly where she wants to be. Naked.

On top of her--

"Mistress I don't know what to do--" She says, her voice quivering a little. "I don't know at all. Please help me."

Mindfang gives her a grin to rival all of the wickedest looks she's ever worn before. It's everything Rosa was hoping to see when she began this endeavor and it's horrible that it's so comforting to see Mindfang smug again. She leans down over her once more and kisses her, hands curving around her waist and urging her to shift her hips a few inches until Mindfang can get comfortable above her.

"Shut up and let me fuck you." She purrs, voice low and rasping like nails raking down over flesh. "And you'll be just fine."
Rosa smiles. Smiles and tries not to cry when she feels Mindfang's fingers slip underneath her underwear and begin to pull them off and then she bites her lip because she's going to start bawling any second now--

"Stop." She says, taking in a sharp breath. "Stop!"

Mindfang stops. She stops with a muted scream of frustration but she does stop so that's something, isn't it?

"Darling?" Mindfang asks, softly, her voice like a sunset sinking on a cold December's day, threatening to plunge her into freezing darkness-- she's curt and clearly at the end of her rope and it makes her snap out of her warm haze of hormones to pay attention to how afraid she is. "Rosa? Are you--?"

"I'm scared," She mumbles, her voice cracking. "I'm scared I'm not good enough."

"Good enough at what?" Mindfang asks, her voice slow and affectionate, like she's talking to someone who's particularly silly or particularly drunk.

Rosa swallows. She swallows and tries to pretend she's not naked, that Mindfang's hands aren't tracing soothing furrows up and down her naked ribcage, that the tickling sensation she's feeling is the stroke of leather gloves over a satin dress instead of cold fingers over heated flesh--

"This. Sex." She says, hollowly. "What if I'm not good enough for you? What if I disappoint you--"

Mindfang kisses her. She kisses her warmly and wetly, their lips sliding together instead of brushing; both mouths are warm and soft and even though Rosa's afraid, her mouth isn't dry and she's glad because it makes it so much easier to kiss her back, desperately-- lips slipping against lips like wet velvet.

"You can't be bad at sex unless you think you're really good at it," Mindfang whispers, breaking off their kiss to layer a line of caresses down her throat with her lips. "Trust me. I'm good at this."

"...I don't think that's very good advice--" She breaks off speaking to moan, breath vanishing from her lungs as Mindfang's hands begin to slip along her skin once more. Her fingers ghost over her ribcage in a steadily northward path until her cool fingertips are brushing against her left breast. She drags her knuckles over her nipple with the barest ghosting of sensation that's utterly foreign and uncomfortable and-- well--

"Nnrggh," She manages to breathe out, as a means of expressing her pleasure. Despite the fact that she's reasonably sure when having intercourse she should be touching her partner, all she's managing to do is cling to the sheet beneath her like it's a lifeline.

Mindfang doesn't seem to mind though. With her hair pinned up to the crown of her head, Rosa can see her face completely unobscured and she looks almost like a statue blooming into life as she meanders around her figure with her fingertips.

She smiles, crookedly, and Rosa smiles back with less of a sense of courage and more of a tremulous need to be touched. "You sound like a symphony. I should record you and sell this--"

"No, I'm not consenting to that." Rosa mutters and Mindfang laughs. Rosa laughs too and some of the tension starts to ebb from her ribcage out, until she can feel herself sort of melting into the mattress.

Mindfang’s hand curls over her breast. Her nipple presses into the palm of Mindfang’s hand and her
fingertips sink into the soft, pillowy flesh surrounding it and she moans again, this time her eyes rolling up into her head. Her eyelashes flutter, vividly and Mindfang lets out a corresponding moan at the sight of it.

"Let me get you naked." She groans, making a pleading wheeze. When the wheeze fails to garner a response she trills softly and nudges her and then does it again and again in notes that are rapidly nearing ones that would signify acute distress, Rosa finally relents.

Rosa nods. Nods is, perhaps, not the correct word. She inclines her chin ever so slightly in a downward direction and Mindfang yelps victoriously and then--

"Will you stop ripping my clothes off!" She snaps. Mindfang laughs and shakes her head, throwing the remnants of Rosa's underwear across the room. Rosa glowers at her until she's kissed into quiescence once more.

It's bizarre to be naked in the same space as another being with intention Rosa realizes, rapidly. It's one thing to be getting dressed at the same time as Mindfang or curled up in nothing but a dressing gown beneath the covers of their bed--

"I like ripping your clothes off," Mindfang murmurs into her ear, breath flirting along her neck. "You get so... deliciously mouthy." Rosa growls. Mindfang kisses her, barely able to make her mark when she sees it coming and tires to evade it. Kissing one another is still just as impressively delectable as it was the first time all those months ago, sending Rosa into a tailspin of feeling.

They're naked and kissing one another. She doesn't think it gets more intimate than this. She reaches up to wrap her arms around Mindfang's neck and instead her hands linger on her back, tracing out the cut of her shoulder blades with her fingertips. Their skin sticks together like suede against leather, Mindfang's relatively cooler skin contrasting strongly against her own warmer hands.

Mindfang traces the shape of her breasts with an artist's hand, pressing against nipples that are making her arousal far too evident and the knee pressed between her legs making it impossible to hide.

They keep kissing, Rosa arching her neck back and forcing Mindfang to fight for access. She keeps going, her tongue searching for something deep within Rosa's mouth and Rosa searches in return. They've never kissed like this before, so passionately, so devotedly, as if the gesture suddenly means something more than expressing a deep affection.

Mindfang breaks their kiss to pant against her throat, "Fuck do I love you, darling," and Rosa feels her throat tighten but doesn't say it back. Mindfang runs her hands across her body and then smiles a little.

"May we have sex now?" She asks and Rosa would normally be horrified at the bluntness but she asks it in a voice that's infused with honey and chocolate and all the warmth she has to offer. "Because as much as I love your breasts, darling, I'd really rather like to get to the good part."

"Then what's stopping you?" Rosa asks her, slowly, raising her eyebrows and trying to look seductive.

It's clearly not at all successful because Mindfang laughs. But she leans in for a sweet, gentle kiss all the same. When she pulls away, she keeps staring into Rosa's eyes with an intensity that borderlines on obsessive-- she looks absolutely driven and Rosa knows what that face means and she's flattered.
to see that Mindfang’s drive to be the best is suddenly being applied to their lovemaking.

That's a nice phrase. She likes that phrase. Lovemaking. It feels so genuinely sweet and affectionate in the most fascinating way. She likes it even more when Mindfang mutters: "I'm going to kiss every inch of you whether you like it or not" and sets off to do just that. She scrambles over Rosa, a knee slipping between her legs. Her skin is icy cold and Rosa wants to yelp and pull away but that seems like a gross breach of sexual etiquette.

Mindfang begins her quest just beneath her jaw, dragging her lips from earlobe to earlobe. She finds the place just behind her ear that makes Rosa chirp and arch her neck to one side so that Mindfang can continue kissing her exactly where she likes.

A hand curls around her waist, fingertips digging into the slight padding of flesh there, knuckles rocking against her hipbone. Rosa does her best not to let her hips rise into the touch because it wouldn't do to seem too over-eager—would it?

Her Mistress trails her lips down to her collarbone and she layers a 'V' of bite marks from collarbone to collarbone, little pinpricks of teeth that make Rosa gasp 'oh' over and over again, biting at her lip until blood begins to trickle into her mouth.

She nuzzles the expanse of skin between her breasts, which are nowhere near as impressive as Mindfang’s own. But they’re there, now that she's been eating properly, and when she feels Mindfang testing their weight against the palms of her hands she shivers from excitement, not from horror of being found lacking.

Before she can anticipate, Mindfang's lips are pressed against her left breast, the flats of her teeth nudging against her nipple.

"Mmmmm-hmn." Rosa moans and Mindfang chuckles. The feeling of the sound reverberating against her throat into Rosa's skin is enough to make her moan again and Mindfang purrs and the cycle continues until Mindfang switches her attention to her other breast.

"Well, someone's taking to this far easier than expected." Mindfang murmurs, laughing a little as she nuzzles and kisses her way down Rosa's ribcage. When she approaches the expanse of skin between her hipbones, Rosa stops her with a whine.

Her Mistress returns to her starting point, clambering over her and kissing her. It's a good kiss, teeth pinching against lips and cheeks rubbing together.

"You're doing so well, Pet," Mindfang assurses her, softly, pressing her lips to her ear. "So good."

"Am I?" She asks, a little too eagerly. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, darling. May I keep going?"

Rosa closes her eyes and sighs through her nose. Point of no return, right? "Yes. Yes, you may."

She bites and sucks and nuzzles at her throat, down to her shoulder. Mindfang lingers there, her breath warm against her neck, making her entire body go hot. She reaches up and curls her fingers into Mindfang's hair, ignoring the feel of hairpins digging into the palms of her hands. The sensation overtakes her quickly and she moans, loudly, dropping her hands to the mattress beside her once more and repeatedly raking her fingers across the silk of the sheets.

She wishes Mindfang's hair was down because she'd really rather like to have Mindfang's tangled curls sweeping around her shoulders. But there's a startling intimacy to the fact that they can stare
each other in the eyes with no interruptions, nothing breaking the odd frisson generated from staring straight at one another.

Mindfang's gaze is as unnerving as it ever was, her seven-pupiled eye trained on her like the sight of a spyglass, staring beyond her face and at something deeper within her. Rosa doesn't flinch though because, well, she's naked beneath her-- there isn't much more exposed she can be.

The weight of Mindfang looming above her is somehow comforting, like an anchor keeping her from drifting off into a sea of anxieties about-- well-- so many things.

Mindfang's still staring at her and the moment she realizes Rosa is giving her less than her full attention, her teeth make sharp contact with her shoulder. The points of her fangs sink into her flesh and Rosa gasps, the sound pained and aching.

"I must demand your undivided attention." Mindfang mutters, huffily. "Stop drifting."

Rosa nods a little and then moans at the feel of Mindfang pressing her knee between her legs with intention. She shivers and then rocks her hips against her, hard. The chill of her skin against heated flesh is perfection--

"Oh goodness," She breathes biting her lip hard enough to bleed and gasping. "Mistress--" Rosa pants, rolling her hips up again.

Mindfang laughs and her voice is like a panther's purr, trailing off into an 'mmmm' when Rosa manages to remember how to move, her fingers unclenching from the sheets with quite a bit of difficulty. She wraps her arms around Mindfang's neck and clings to her, hard.

Rosa kisses her. Kisses her as best as she can when the entirety of her brain is between her thighs.

Mindfang doesn't allow the kiss to continue very long. She breaks away and gives Rosa a pointed look. Rosa slumps back onto the mattress, trailing her fingers across Mindfang's neck before allowing her arms to fall back and hands cover her breasts.

"We can spend the night making out or we can get to it-- I'm just going to let you know now that I will not be pleased if I don't get off tonight."

Rosa makes a pained sound when Mindfang attempts to pull away. This earns her a knowing stare and a brilliant smirk. "Judging from your face, I don't think you want that either." She accompanies her words by running her thumb over her lower lip and chuckling.

"Keep going," Rosa manages to pant. "Keep going."

Mindfang grins. She grins and grinds her knee between her legs. Rosa claws at the mattress to either side of her, overwhelmed by a wave of arousal that sends her reeling. Mindfang seizes this opportunity to attach herself to her shoulder.

Rosa struggles to breathe normally as the weight of arousal settles around her chest. She wants Mindfang to touch her, touch her in a thousand places at once--

Before Rosa can acclimate to the feel of lips on her collarbones once more there's the brush of lips over the soft flesh of her breast, followed by the press of the flats of Mindfang's incisors against her nipple. The pressure is firm and unyielding and while she's gasping from the unknown contact Mindfang's hand tickles up her ribcage to grasp her other breast.

"Mmmmm--" Rosa pants. "Oh dear--"
Mindfang snorts. It sends a smattering of sensation down her body and she presses her hips up into Mindfang's above her. She spends what Rosa thinks is far too much time worshipping the shape of her breasts.

Eventually, though, she seems to distract herself by allowing her hands to slip down her body to grasp her hips hard enough to bruise.

"Let me touch you," she begs, voice authoritative yet showing enough space to give way. "Please, Rosa."

She nods. She nods slowly but, well, it's a nod all the same.

Mindfang's hand slips between her legs, with a slow certainty. Rosa's never had a hand anywhere near her nook before, other than her own. Her face colors and she lets out a caterwaul, rocking her hips against her Mistress's hand. Mindfang isn't doing anything but resting her hand against the wet warmth of her nook; she's not doing anything to manipulate her, simply lingering.

Mindfang is staring at her quizzically, waiting for her to say something or somehow react. But she can't. She can't think of a way to make herself sound less than a hapless virgin. Which, of course, she is.

"Rosa, are you quite sure about this--"

"I am." Rosa breathes, her voice low and soft, whispering over her lips. "Please."

Mindfang smiles and kisses her, gently, their lips parting but nothing more occurring. Rosa reaches up and curls her fingers around the back of her neck, stroking the soft, fine hairs around the base of her skull. Her skin is soft beneath her fingers and it makes her shiver more than a little to feel the cool warmth of her.

That is, of course, when Mindfang chooses to twist her wrist so instead of the bumps of her knuckles digging in ever so slightly, a pair of rather dexterous fingers are rubbing against her.

"May I?" She asks, softly, keeping her eyes trained on Rosa's. It's a solemn gaze. Or is it lusty? Damnit. Solemn lust? She's got a woman's hand against her nook who the hell cares.

Rosa nods and forces her eyes shut. She doesn't want to see this. She doesn't want to see this and have the image of Mindfang's face etched in her mind for the rest of her days--

Mindfang parts the folds of her nook with fingers that are incredibly confident. She makes a slow, anxiety-producing pass down the length of her, letting out a moan of her own.

Rosa keens at the sound. Mindfang gives her a warm smile and makes a soft, soothing noise.

"Don't get carried away so quickly, Pet," Mindfang purrs, stroking her fingers against her once more. Rosa can't describe quite what it feels like, aside from wonderful.

Mindfang swoops in to kiss her once more, nibbling at her lower lip and nuzzling her cheek. Rosa kisses her back feverishly, ignoring when her horns snag and tear her pillow just a little; she ignores how frantic she feels to feel Mindfang touching her--

"Spread your legs," Mindfang urges, breaking the kiss to roughly grab her breast, nails digging in just enough to leave a curve of jade crescents along her skin. "Spread them," Mindfang orders again, her voice husky.
Rosa shakes her head. A few feathers fly up from the pillow and she winces. "No," She breathes, barely able to speak. "No I can't--"

Mindfang gives her a grimace and Rosa inhales, sharply, at the feel of her fingers slipping away from her nook to grasp the backs of her knees. She moans at the feel of fingertips against the sensitive skin there and simply dissolves into incoherent syllables when Mindfang's touch curls around the underside of her thighs.

She nudges them apart. Rosa squeezes her eyes shut, tearing at the sheets beneath her hands in an attempt to stay grounded. "Look at me, Pet," Mindfang breathes into her ear, hot breath wisping against her neck. Rosa shakes her head violently.

Mindfang sighs and begins to trace abstract shapes into the soft skin of her inner thighs. Rosa bites at her lip and refuses to look at her.

"Look at me," Mindfang repeats and her fingers stroke closer and closer to her nook once more. "Rosa."

She ignores her and chooses to focus on the tantalizing feeling of Mindfang's touch so close and yet so far from where she needs it to be. As Mindfang makes a move to withdraw her hand, however, Rosa squalls and opens her eyes.

Mindfang's staring down at her with a lustful intensity, all eight pupils blown huge and face flushed. Rosa goes jade green in a matter of moments of being stared at.

As Mindfang continues to stare, she wordlessly begins where she left off. She traces the shape of her nook with slow, short strokes until Rosa's legs relax just a little more-- until Mindfang can settle between her legs. Without needing more than perfunctory urging she slips a leg around Mindfang's hips.

There's no going back now. But still, Mindfang relieves her anxiety by kissing her once more, tongue grappling against the roof of her mouth. Mindfang allows the momentary distraction to calm her and then-- suddenly--

She brushes against the always exposed tip of her bulge. Rosa lets out a short cry of surprise that turns into a lusty moan. Mindfang smirks at her and arches an eyebrow.

"My my, someone's excited," Mindfang purrs, rubbing her knuckles against her. Rosa gasps and, finally, decides that she doesn't give a damn about propriety anymore.

She arches her hips into Mindfang's touch and writhes across the sheets, tossing her head from side to side. She's eternally thankful that this isn't the point in her reproductive cycle that her bulge will fully engage and instead she's left with nothing more than a small patch of overly-sensitized nerves.

"That's it, Pet," Mindfang breathes, rocking her hand against her once more, sending flickers of sensation arching through her body like waves of electricity.

"Mmmmghh--" Rosa manages to say, feeling as if she's melting into the sheets, the tension seeping out of her the longer Mindfang touches her until all she can feel is the heady bloom of arousal opening her up to Mindfang's attentions.

"There," She gasps, loudly, the sound like a clap of thunder as Mindfang presses her thumbnail into her bulge tip and her fingers make an anguishing slow pass around the opening of her nook. "Oh-- Yes-- there--"
Her body begins to move with utter abandon, hips rising to meet Mindfang's touch and hands rising off of the bed to grasp her back. Mindfang makes a pleased sound at the feel of Rosa's touch and for the first time Rosa spares enough thought process to realize that perhaps she's slacking a little bit but then--

"Pay attention," Mindfang rasps and Rosa cries out, sharply, as she slides a finger deep inside of her. It's a sensation that she can't even begin to elucidate. The muscles of her nook immediately contract around her. Rosa jerks away from the touch but, no, that's not what she wants, so she thrusts her hips forward back into sharp contact with Mindfang's fingers.

She keeps making small circles against her bulge with her thumb but it's at a slower more leisurely pace--

"Oh--" Rosa keens, the syllable catching. Ohhhh is that nice. She swallows and tries to fend off the sharp increase in arousal that hits her. "Mistress," she gasps.

"No," Mindfang hisses, voice going suddenly violent. "Say my name."

"Mindfang--" She forces out, spreading her legs even more.

Mindfang ducks her head down and bites at her neck hard, hard enough that Rosa feels blood rise to the surface. "Say my name!" She growls and Rosa's forced to acknowledge what she wants.

"Vienna," She breathes out, the 'en' of her name catching on a moan like the note of an aria.

"Vienna--"

Mindfang rocks her fingers against her with a pleased noise. Rosa's all but overcome when Mindfang guides another finger inside of her, slowly. She's forced to abandon the capacity for spoken word as her fingers crook and hit her in a million foreign places--

Without another thought she reaches up to grab Mindfang's horns. This earns her a moan and Rosa struggles to keep herself in one piece at the sound of it. Everything's warm and molten and filling her with a desire to act upon a more animalistic urge--

She hisses, sharply, as Mindfang brushes against something that makes her legs melt apart. Her skin begins to blaze and, when Rosa steals a glance downwards, she sees that her normally ash gray skin is turning a pale green.

Rosa's body skitters across the sheets as she frantically attempts to relocate whatever it was that Mindfang touched. For once she feels like she's inhabiting every last centimeter of her body and Mindfang is doing her best to do the same.

"Ohhhh did we like that?" Mindfang purrs, pushing against her once more. Rosa nods, frantically, as she touches that something again. "Look at you, my gorgeous girl."

Mindfang's moaning just as much as she is now, and Rosa feels the changes in tension all throughout her Mistress's body as she repositions herself. She shifts so that Rosa's knee is pressed between her legs which seems bizarre until, with every arch of her wrist, she rocks her hips--

She's warm against her, nook warm and wet and-- oh dear-- Rosa throws her head back and makes a garbled noise as Mindfang's searching becomes fruitful and she hits her in just the right place once more.

"That's it," Mindfang gasps, grinning through a caterwaul of sexual pleasure as she works herself against Rosa. "That's it darling, isn't it?"
"Yes." Rosa pants, nodding frantically. "Oh yes--"

There's something overwhelming her, something that she doesn't know how to put into a tongue that a sentient being would understand.

It's a frantic, desperate feeling, a pins and needles burst of electricity that doesn't seem to end. Mindfang keeps moving, lapping at her breasts.

"Mindfaaaaaaang--" She moans, her voice reaching aria and crashing down like the dying strains of an orchestra. "Mindfang--" She gasps out, her reaching up to touch her with hands that are frantically searching for an anchor to keep her body from imploding.

Mindfang keeps moving with the ease of an experienced conductor. She glances up from Rosa's breasts to, apparently, witness her final moments. Her face is flushed a lapis blue and her lips are coated in a thin layer of saliva from the number of times she's licked them in the past five seconds. Her eyes blaze with passion in a way that Rosa usually associates with religious fervor-- an undying, mindless devotion to a cause.

Rosa can't stop writhing, her body frantically searching for a plateau that eludes her as perfectly as a single grain of sand on a beach. Mindfang's weight is utterly reassuring above her, keeping her steady.

"Hnnngmng--" She's beginning to lose the power to speak, it would seem; her back, already contorted in a perfect sine curve; the urge to close her eyes, bite her lip-- close herself off from Mindfang's observation-- is strong.

She resists. She doesn't want to miss a single second of Mindfang's dissertation on the best way to bring a naive jade blood to orgasm. Rosa breathes in through her nose, feeling her ribcage rise against Mindfang's with considerable difficulty.

"Touch me," She finds room in her lungs for those two words. Mindfang nods, slightly and Rosa feels her touch get rougher, the sharpness of her knuckles pressing against the tip of her bulge and her fingers twisting like a corkscrew within her--

Rosa moans so loudly that she feels her vocal cords twinge. Mindfang keens in response and Rosa's fingernails rip lines down her back, from her shoulder blades to the curve of her hips. She hisses, sharply and her hand presses against her--

Her hips twist and arch at just the right angle. Mindfang brushes against her at just the precise place that makes her stop breathing. Her eyes go so wide her vision loses focus--

"There it is," Mindfang purrs, her voice like the headiest bouquet of wine. "There you go--"

Rosa spreads her legs as wide as she can and feels her toes curl beneath her, feet scrabbling for purchase. She breathes in, painfully and throws her head back.

Her first orgasm washes over her like the aftershocks of an earthquake, sending each molecule of her body vibrating on a different frequency. Her body suddenly refuses to obey any commands and she lets out a perilously deep moan. Her fingernails sink into Mindfang's skin and Mindfang cries out above her.

She clings to Mindfang as if she can convince their skin to meld together, staring her in the eyes as best as she can. Her vision is unfocused but she can still see the blue of Mindfang's eyes, as bright at the sky.
"Look at me," Mindfang moans, her voice emanating from her chest. "Look at me."

Rosa does, somehow, and it's the most beautiful expression she's ever seen. Mindfang keeps working her body against her better judgment until she's howling Mindfang's name, unable to think of anything more than the brush of nerves against nerves and skin against skin and--

She can't quite find the right words. Mindfang might find words to describe this, the exhilarating, all-encompassing feeling of her most intimate places and feelings being willingly possessed by another person--

Rosa allows a final moan to slip through her lungs. Mindfang, still rocking against her, lets out an enthusiastic noise and keeps pressing herself against Rosa's knee. Rosa would like to be a more active participant in Mindfang experiencing her own pleasure but-- well--

Her body seems to have given up on listening to her whatsoever. Except now, as the last of her orgasm sweeps over her and shakes her from her ears to her ankles, she can't seem to make herself move.

Every inch of her is pleasantly limp, like she's spent the day out in the sunshine and there's a scintillating after wave of endorphins rippling from her nook outwards.

Mindfang finishes up on her own, pressing her face into Rosa's shoulders and letting out a pleased groan. She lies there, her face pressed to Rosa's and their legs twined together, until they both feel their hearts beating at a rate that's slightly closer to normal.

Eventually, Mindfang slips off of her and curls up at her side, clutching Rosa close to her. The urge to scramble out of bed and clean up is... not at all existent, and Rosa's shocked by that because while neither of them are reproducing there's still a fair amount of genetic material pooling on the sheets--

"Sorry for humping your leg." Mindfang says, hazily, reaching around her to cup her breasts. Rosa chirps and throws her head back to nuzzle her. "I love you."

"I know you do." Rosa replies, her voice feeling like it weighs ten tons. "Sorry I just laid there."

"S'ok. First time's hard." Mindfang snuggles in even closer, until they're completely wrapped up in one another beneath the sheets.

"...Can we do that again?" Rosa asks, after a pause. To her immense gratification, Mindfang just laughs. She rests her head on Mindfang's shoulder and presses her cheeks into the flushed skin of her throat.
in which Rosa has a mid-life breakdown of sorts

Chapter Summary

Rosa and Mindfang enjoy a rather terse morning after and fall in love with an art museum. The day is later ruined by Mindfang thinking Rosa is hot, which you wouldn't really think is an issue but totally is.

Chapter Notes

Obligatory note about how I got a medical diagnosis in August that I've been struggling to come to terms with. It's nothing life-threatening but it's kind of sucky and my writing's taken a bit of a toll while I try to get my life back under control. Hopefully the next update won't take so long; but this chapter's 75 pages so I hope that makes up for it?

Art by the wonderful littlewingmod (littlewingmod.tumblr.com). I love these pictures so much; they're above my desk in my dorm right now and they're very nice company.

DISCLAIMER: I do not own, nor am I particularly affiliated with the Twilight books, I just couldn't pass up the joke. I like my vampires as bamfs, preferably cannibalistic and totally afraid of Buffy Summers.

TWs for talk of attempted suicide and cannibalism.

When Rosa wakes up, Mindfang is in bed beside her-- wide awake. It's an unusual circumstance, Mindfang awakening before her, but she gives her a sleepy smile and rolls onto her back all the same.

"Good morning, Mistress," She says with a yawn, covering her mouth with her hand. Her muscles twinge in protest as she breathes in deep, like she spent the night running from the Imperial Army, then slept on the floor of a cave with a squalling toddler at her side.

Except, of course, she knows full well she's in a featherbed at a luxurious hotel in the southern region of the Empire with the ocean crashing a few yards away. Her confusion is only momentary, of course, because as she stretches out across the bed the sheets slip from her skin and her naked body is bared. She gives Mindfang a shy smile and flushes, deep green.

Her body feels warm all over, like there's a sun radiating from her inside out. She can feel Mindfang on every square inch of her skin, woven through her hair and into her breath and into her very being. It's a sensation she never wants to lose.

Mindfang is sitting up, curled in on herself with her knees to her chest and shoulders slouched forward. The only reason Rosa can tell she's still equally as nude as herself is that she can see a scar that curves around her right breast. She wants to know how she got that, what the story is-- who was the one to sew it up for her. Marcus, probably, she decides.
Rosa reaches out, slowly, and trails a hand across Mindfang's calf. Mindfang won't make eye contact with her, eyes flickering nervously from her own feet, to the floor, to the ceiling, to the art on the walls-- anywhere but at Rosa's face.

Rosa would be offended by her avoidance if she couldn't see how incredibly tense her hands are, how tight her jaw has become and how sharp her breaths are. It's not the enraged fury of a fearful Mindfang like she's used to, but it's still a clear fear. Poor darling. She should put her out of her misery, shouldn't she? Without pausing to consider her actions she sits up like a languid sphinx, arching her back and moaning cheerfully.

It gets her attention, at the least. Rosa turns to smile at her, but she doesn't smile back until Rosa scoffs and mutters: "Honestly, woman, I'm already naked, what do I have to do to get you interested?"

Mindfang relaxes a little but doesn't move closer. Rosa huffs, falling to her hands and knees and crawling over to her. Climbing into Mindfang's lap is hard, considering how she's huddled up, but she manages it, nuzzling beneath Mindfang's chin and tucking herself in between her thighs. Mindfang grudgingly makes room for her, allowing her knees to be shoved aside and her head to be tilted back in order to accommodate Rosa. She can feel Mindfang's breasts against her back as she settles in and she suddenly finds herself wondering what they'd feel like beneath her hands.

From the angle she's curled up at she can see a trail of teeth marks down her own arm, as well as a line of lipstick smudges across Mindfang's throat. Her Mistress's hair is mussed in the most endearing way, her curls hanging around her face in an incredibly touchable manner. Her makeup is smudged but it doesn't look at all bad-- or perhaps Rosa's just gone soft.

The sunlight's streaming in across their bed and she closes her eyes, luxuriating in it like a kitten. Mindfang is struggling to remain calm behind her, breath coming in carefully controlled bursts of ten seconds. Her heart beats, of course, and her chest rises and falls-- she's perfect and alive and Rosa's stomach clenches in unison with her heart when she realizes just how much she cares for the woman who bought her.

"You're giving me a horrible standard for the morning after," Rosa muses, when Mindfang doesn't say a word after they've both been awake for close to a half hour. The words make her tense and she tries to pull away. At that, Rosa is hurt, and snaps, "I rather enjoyed myself and rather thought the feeling was mutual, Marquise."

When she tries to climb out of Mindfang's lap and sweep off in a huff, however, Mindfang finally reacts, wrapping an arm around her waist and using her other hand to pull her head back in order to expose her neck. Rosa squalls, but Mindfang does nothing more than tug, softly, at her horns and then press her lips to the hollow between her collarbones.

"Did you enjoy yourself?" She asks, and it's authoritative but her voice quavers just enough that Rosa knows sarcasm won't be a benefit to any of them.

Rosa shakes herself out of Mindfang's grasp as gently as she can. Mindfang looks worried but Rosa allays her fears by kissing her, lips brushing against lips with the faintest hint of friction since both of them could really use some lip balm at this point.

Mindfang seems to be appeased by this because she pulls her close and Rosa feels fingertips trailing down her spine. She shivers and breaks their kiss to arch her back and mewl into her touch. Mindfang's eyes begin to gleam with a coy happiness and Rosa's blush spreads from her collarbones up into her hairline.
"Good girl," She breathes and Rosa smirks. This is nice. She can get used to this, watching Mindfang’s eyes go wide and her pupils flare with pleasure at looking at her naked body. She could get used to feeling her breath against her breasts, against her thighs, against her back. She could get used to falling asleep to feeling Mindfang’s fingertips catalogue her scars and beg her to whisper their stories to her--

"Did I meet your expectations, Mistress?" Rosa purrs, nudging at Mindfang's jaw until she cranes her neck and allows Rosa to kiss the exposed underside of her chin. Mindfang laughs and nods, which is a far better response than a derogatory comment about her sexual performance. She finally relaxes, stretching across their bed like a queen and Rosa drapes herself over her, staring up at the ceiling.

She can feel Mindfang breathing, feel the pounding of her heart begin to subside and feel the heat rise in her skin as she warms to Rosa’s advances once more. Naked, vulnerable, soft-- she's completely exposed for Rosa to peruse as she wishes and it's a wonderful, exhilarating, intoxicating feeling that she doesn't think she'll ever get used to.

Mindfang smells strange, and Rosa half wonders if it's the pheromones or stale perfume, but she still smells delectable. Rosa's reasonably sure that there isn't a vampire alive who wouldn't attempt to eat her on the spot, but perhaps even the most bloodthirsty of fiends would stop to admire her first.

But that's a hypothesis meant to be tested in the realm of fantasy. Right now she can kiss the smooth skin of her shoulders, drag her fingertips over her body and marvel at the way her skin twitches under her touch. That is, she could do all of that if she felt motivated enough to roll over and move.

"You were phenomenal, my darling girl," Mindfang breathes, running her fingers through her hair. Rosa grins up at her and Mindfang smiles back. She doesn't look at all haughty, but instead proud and utterly content. It's an odd look but it suits her and Rosa resists the urge to scramble atop of her and kiss her senseless.

"You are simply phenomenal." Mindfang repeats and Rosa beams at the praise, snuggling in even closer to her side. Mindfang is warm beside her, almost room temperature for once instead of far beneath it and she doesn't need to grab the sheets to keep her warm.

"I know," Rosa replies and Mindfang snorts. She sits up, finally, and rolls over, draping herself over Mindfang. Mindfang gives her a quizzical stare but she's smirking in the greatest way and Rosa wants to have sex with her right at that very second.

"And just think of how much better I'll get with practice." She murmurs and Mindfang's face goes blank and then lights up like a Empire-Ordained bonfire of dissentious literature. Rosa's tackled to the bed in a flurry of limbs and Mindfang's kissing her passionately, fingers curling around her breasts, her horns, her hair, her skin. Rosa clings to her, making soft noises of assent and pleasure whenever Mindfang does anything particularly remarkable with her tongue or fingers.

"You're so brave." Mindfang murmurs against her lips, between brushes of lips and kisses interrupted by kisses. "You're so brave, my darling girl,"

"Not really," Rosa says, laughing, but it's exhilarating to hear all the same. "I know you'll take care of me."

"...Damnit Rosa," Mindfang huffs and Rosa finds herself overcome by a newly amorous pirate queen kissing her face in a hundred different places. Rosa giggles and kisses her back until they're both being absolutely ridiculous-- not even romantic but silly. It's bizarre since they're both naked and Rosa's reasonably sure there's a good deal of genetic material dried on their skin but-- well-- it's just nice to be young and ridiculous and-- well--
Ecstatic together. Pretending that no one in her life had been sacrificed on the imperial pyre, pretending that Mindfang's not dubiously moralized, pretending that there's not a chance that all of this is just an elaborate fantasy Mindfang has constructed in her brain so subtly she hasn't even noticed--

"Darling girl." Mindfang murmurs, kissing her lips-- finally. "My darling girl--"

Rosa cuts her off by shoving her tongue into her mouth. Mindfang says 'mmph' which might been an attempt to say 'good girl, best pet' or it could have been 'you sexy, sexy beast I want you to take me now'. Except there was really only one syllable of 'mmph' so it was probably 'yessssssss'.

Mindfang runs her fingers through her hair, skirting around her horns and Rosa makes a faux growly noise that just turns into a moan. Mindfang likes this, clearly, because she does it again until Rosa's kissing her back with an intimidating ardency.

"I'm so glad you don't hate me." Mindfang murmurs when they break apart.

Rosa wants to roll her eyes, but she nuzzles Mindfang's shoulder and stretches out beside her. "Why? Was the sex really that far below your usual standard?"

"No you ridiculous woman." Mindfang wraps herself up in the comforter, vainly attempting to hide Rosa beneath the blankets as well. She groans and squirms away. "That was, quite possibly, the most enjoyable evening of my life."

"You're flattering me."

"Oi. Never said the sex was the best I'd ever had-- not, of course, that it wasn't good, don't give me that face it was your first time-- but it was... nice."

She slips her hand out from beneath the sheets and reaches for Rosa's. Rosa lets her take it and their fingers twine together like the tendrils of a pair of vines that have spent years growing around the trunk of an immemorial oak, meandering across the bark in pathways forged by nature's gentlest hand and still never able to meet-- until, of course, they reach a branch just slim enough that the vines are able to twist together and in their final blossom, wither together into an inflexible stem.

Having Mindfang's fingers against her own suddenly feels just as intimate as her fingers between her legs. The feel of fingertips against fingertips is like holding their souls together for the briefest moment of eternity--

"You make me remember what it was like to sail on the open ocean for the first time," Mindfang breathes, trailing her knuckles over Rosa's palm. The sapphires set into her rings glide against the fate lines of her palm like cold reminders of her mortality and the best way to make use of it. "Every time I look in your eyes I just remember what it felt like to see waves rising up around me."

Rosa wants to let her words lull her back to sleep. She wants to allow the syllables to convince her to have sweet dreams but-- well-- Mindfang's gaze is quietly commanding. Not in a 'LOOK AT ME' way but in a 'you are the only being in the universe other than myself and I want to adore you' sort of way.

So she looks back into those eyes, so soft and full of emotion across the pillow, and smiles. She smiles and squeezes her hand, tightly.

"I can't wield my words quite so eloquently," Rosa says, quietly, feeling as if the serendipity of this tranquil morning will somehow be corrupted if her words become too loud. "And... and I suppose I can't make a comparison. But... but I certainly... relish... being allowed to feel so close to you."
Mindfang gives her a gorgeous smile and squirms over until they're sharing a pillow. Rosa flushes at the gentle intimacy of it all. "You don't hate me?"

"No." Rosa says, yawning until her jaw cracks. Mindfang makes a sound that's suspiciously close to an affectionate 'aww'. "You're too sweet."

"Sweet? First you tell me that I'm not a real pirate for not ravishing you," Mindfang nuzzles into her neck and nips with the sharpest points of her eyeteeth in a snakelike pattern that's quite impressive. "And now I'm sweet. What am I, a puppy?"

Rosa wrinkles her nose and squirms away from Mindfang and her teeth. She doesn't make it very far before Mindfang whines-- whimpers, really-- and she's forced to stop. "A very big scary puppy? With little fangs--"

Mindfang groans and buries her face into the pillow. "Fuck all, I can't remember why I was so afraid you'd be mad at me what the hell Rosa--"

She tickles Mindfang's ribs until she hears her squawk. "With big, floppy paws and quite possibly a cute little studded collar that's got a little polka dot bow--"

"No, stop, you're ruining my self-image--" Mindfang grumbles, rolling her eyes. "You ridiculous woman--"

Rosa snuggles in next to her, pretending that she's not hyper aware of the fact that they're both naked as the day they emerged from their pre-pubescent cocoons. Mindfang certainly doesn't seem at all conscious of this fact, making faux predatory noise "Awww but you'd make a cute puppy. We could get you a little eye patch--"

Mindfang scrambles atop of her, taking a seat on Rosa's ribcage. She moves shockingly quickly for a woman who looked as lethargic as a 12 year old cat just moments before. But, then again, she's always been more of a ocelot than a housecat.

"Rosa, you do realize that I will have my revenge, don't you?" She murmurs, coyly, running her fingers across Rosa's ribs like an expert symphonist playing an xylophone. She squirms a little but doesn't try to get away. It's difficult, but forcing herself to give Mindfang free access to her body is hardly the worst thing ever.

Oh dear. That sounds incorrect, doesn't it. Oh whatever-- if this is going to lead to more sex, she's fine with it. Mindfang growls a little, purposefully flexing her ears back and rocking her hips against Rosa's in an incredibly suggestive manner. A manner that is suggestive of sex.

"Yes, but I'm beginning to understand that your idea of revenge might just entail you tying me up and having your way with me," Rosa arches her eyebrows and squeezes Mindfang's waist. She trills as the sensation, apparently liking Rosa touching her... which is gratifying. "And I think I'm quite fine with that prospect."

"I'm quite fine with that prospect!" Mindfang mutters, darkly, digging her nails into Rosa's skin just a little. Rosa inhales, sharply.

"Was that meant to be a clever comeback?" Rosa says, chuckling. "Because it wasn't. At all."

"Damnit Rosa!" Mindfang glares and flops off of her. "I have half a mind to stay in here and sulk all day instead of doing what I planned."

"Can't we just stay here?" Rosa asks, softly, feeling foolish as she speaks, like a puppy in its early
adolescence that understands what she's doing wrong but is utterly unable to control herself. Mindfang makes a sympathetic trill but instead of assenting wrinkles her nose in a way that's frankly adorable. Rosa makes a soft noise of despair and Mindfang shushes her.

"I arranged a lovely little surprise for you, Pet, don't make me renege." Mindfang purrs a little, her pupils glittering in the diffuse light of dawn.

Rosa leans in towards her and does her best to look coy, stretching out in a way she hopes emphasizes her frankly disappointing breasts. She arches her eyebrows and gives her a pointed stare. "Wouldn't you prefer to stay here--"

"No we are not staying in bed and having sex all day. We are not falling into that death trap we'll just fuck each other's brains out and then it's like 'oh well, been there done that' and then you wake up with a decapitated shark in your bed, is that what you want, Rosa?"

Mindfang's voice gets increasingly more high pitched and frenetic as she speaks, like a wave piling upon itself until it reaches its zenith and comes crashing down to terra firma once more.

"..." Rosa raises her eyebrows and gives her a look, as if to say 'do you honestly think I'm capable of that?'. Not to say that she isn't, of course, because she would be. She would be capable of murdering an animal to make a point. But perhaps a decapitated chicken or sheep-- she doesn't swim per say so capturing a shark might be difficult.

"Most of my romantic experience is of the black variety." Mindfang admits, needlessly, reaching out with one of her long, toned legs to twine herself around Rosa. She curls close until their faces are almost touching and a few deep breaths would be enough for them to melt together into a sea of warm flesh and fluttery gasps for air.

Instead of any of that, however, Mindfang simply traces her fingers along her upper arm like she's fondling a shawl made from the finest cashmere. The ball of her foot traces up and down the bones of Rosa's calf. It tickles, but in a giddy way, not a 'stop that' ticklish way--

"I think your black quadrant is already filled." Rosa reminds her, her breath hitching a little as Mindfang’s knee rubs against her inner thigh. "And I have no interest in replacing the man currently occupying that position."

Mindfang beams, for whatever reason, and kisses her. Rosa kisses back, lips locked together and tongues making soft brushes in a battle for real estate.

Rosa closes her eyes and relaxes into the kiss, for once allowing her brain to cease functioning because goodness does it feel good just to kiss her.

"I pity you." Mindfang whispers, like they're in a full room and it's a secret needing to be kept utterly in confidence. "So much."

Rosa can't stop herself from smiling. Neither can her Mistress. She reaches up and curls her fingers into Mindfang's hair, fingertips resting just behind her ear where her neck has been artfully carved by the hands of a master artisan.

They lie there in the quiet, listening to the faint sound of waves crashing upon a warm Mediterranean shore. The fact that the ocean is so near is a needed comfort, a fact that Rosa never imagined applying to herself.

Mindfang looks different, somehow, the angles of her face less sharp and the contours of her muscle melting into the lines of her flesh. There's still a powerful woman there beside her, eyes half shut and
small moans seeping out of her throat as Rosa begins to stroke her scalp in long, luxuriant gestures. But, well, Rosa's not so afraid of her anymore. Not that she was particularly afraid before, but, well--

It's... it's really rather nice to look at her and know there's nothing keeping them apart. Well. Aside from the secrets and the power discrepancy, the fear of the Empire, Mindfang's superior physical prowess--

Well. There's a lot keeping them apart, perhaps. But not as women. If they strip away everything else, if they ignore every shred of their histories-- there's nothing that can keep them apart.

"I wish we had an ocean view," Rosa murmurs absently. "I don't like waking up and not seeing the waves."

Mindfang lets out a beleaguered huff but she's still smiling as she scoffs loudly at Rosa. "What kind of woman do you think I am, Annora? I would never stoop so low as to cut corners by renting a cheaper room while seducing you."

"Don't call me Annora." Rosa says, absently, allowing her fingers to follow the flow of gravity down to Mindfang's breasts. "I don't like that."

"But I--" Mindfang's voice gets slightly breathy as Rosa curls her fingers into the soft flesh of her breasts, experimenting with the weight of them. "Annora--"

"No. I like Rosa." She says firmly, pressing her fingers to Mindfang's lips. Mindfang grouchies at the loss of touch but the noise is more of a tired creaking of old wood instead of the sharp snap of a branch giving way. "It's who I am now."

"...Ugh whatever, fine. But I reserve the right to call you whatever I feel like when we have sex."

"And I reserve the right to do the same."

"Okay, it's settled. Having sex means we can do whatever we want to anyone."

"I suggest you rephrase that." Rosa says, warningly, narrowing her eyes.

"..." She doesn't look at all chastened, unsurprisingly, her face flushing a little but her expression hardening into a slight frown. "Sorry, Pet. I didn't mean it quite like that--"

Rosa huffs but decides to forgive her all the same. She is a decent woman, when it comes down to brass tacks. Not noble, perhaps. Not noble at all. Buying yourself a sexual partner is hardly the high ground. But she was sweet and tender and remarkably understanding last night that Rosa can't remember anything at the moment beyond the gossamer glint of feeling that Mindfang's fingers dredged up all over her skin.

"What time is it?" She asks, instead of continuing the argument. Mindfang curls around her like a particularly effervescent feline, resting her chin against Rosa's sternum. Her face is distorted in an impressive pout for forgiveness and Rosa giggles. "Well, Mistress?"

"Breakfast time?" Mindfang ventures, smiling a little. "Let me spoil you."

Rosa beams and purrs like a lioness. "I accept this proposal."

* * *

Mindfang helps her out of bed. It's not a gesture that's at all necessary-- they had sex not a duel at
dawn; she's not quite *that* exhausted. Unless fighting for occupancy space on the mattress was a
duel? But she doesn't recollect doing that. She and her Mistress do not, as a rule, have any difficulty
sharing a bed. And if they managed perfectly fine on her exponentially smaller berth back in the
*Widow*, the oversized bed they're sharing now shouldn't pose a problem.

"Why are you carrying me?" Rosa laughs, wrapping herself around Mindfang as if it's nothing
abnormal to be hauled about like a bag of freshly sheared fleece. "Put me down!"

Mindfang rolls her eyes and hoists Rosa a little higher on her waist. Rosa snorts in reply, twining her
angles together behind Mindfang's back. She's surprisingly bone ridden for a woman who's so
voluptuous; Rosa can feel her hipbones jutting into her thighs. "I'm carrying you because I *can.*"

"That's an awful reason, darling." Rosa mutters, squeezing her neck a little too tightly between her
palms. "Give me a better one."

Mindfang stops her trek across the room to give her a bemused stare. Rosa stares back, archly,
raising an eyebrow and putting on her best 'I'm waiting for you to tell me the truth before I ground
you' face that always worked so well on the children.

"...Had to get you out of bed *somehow.*" Mindfang admonishes, quietly, apparently unable to escape
the influence of Rosa's disapproval. "Don't make that face, Pet--"

"*And?*" Rosa prods, scowling a little.

Mindfang glares back and kicks the door to their en-suite bathroom open with remarkable alacrity
since she's walking backwards. "And you're naked and I like it."

"*That's it.*" Rosa murmurs, brushing Mindfang's hair off of her face. It's matted to her neck with
sweat and she wrinkles her nose at how it feels beneath her fingers. "You need to take a bath."

She rolls her eyes and sets Rosa onto the floor, keeping a steady hold on her waist until Rosa's feet
are planted on the floor.

"That's the idea--" The 'stupid' part of the sentence lingers in the air like an annoyed party guest who
wasn't offered champagne before everyone took seconds, and Rosa *would* have to be stupid to know
how that sentence was going to end before her Mistress thought better of it.

"That's the general idea, Pet." Mindfang says, lamely, trying to cover her tracks. Rosa snarls at her
without any malice and reaches out to jab her in the ribs, forgetting for a few seconds that she's
utterly naked.

Mindfang reacts to the gesture with a surprising amount of distress, yowling and skittering away a
few inches. "*Don't!*" She begs as Rosa lunges as quickly as she can and grabs her again by the
ribs.

"Then don't call me stupid." Rosa hisses into her ear, kissing her cheek hastily before slipping past
her into the shower. "I'm showering first."

She steps inside of the vast glass enclosure and closes the door, snarling at her from behind it.
Mindfang tosses her hair behind her a gesture that's breathtakingly *attractive* while she's nude,
breasts shaking as the energy of the movement carries down her body.

"You're really slow on the uptake about how romantic relationships *work* aren't you?" Mindfang
says, slowly, as she slides the shower door open. Rosa glares even more broodingly and turns the
shower on. The attempt was designed to cover Mindfang in cold water and effectively scare her off
"For the love of--" Mindfang huffs, reaching forward and tweaking the dial all the way up. The water goes from pellets of molten ice to a steady stream of glacial runoff. "Pet, you're going to be the death of me."

"I'm all wet." She mutters, angrily, as Mindfang cozies up to her, wrapping her arms around Rosa's waist in order to rest her hands at her lower back, angling their hips together and resting her head on Rosa's shoulder.

"I'll be you are," Mindfang says, smugly. "You certainly were last night."

Rosa blushes from her cheekbones to her breasts, immediately letting out a concerned squeak. Mindfang laughs and pulls her closer until she's almost entirely out of the water's merciless spray.

"Relax." She murmurs, hugging her. Rosa relaxes into the embrace with the alacrity of a python uncurling itself onto a sunny desert rock. "Nothing wrong with that."

"You make it sound like there is." Rosa mumbles hesitantly, turning to bury her face into Mindfang's neck. She doesn't smell properly; her perfume's been washed away by the spray of the shower and a night passed getting rather physically involved. "Is it a good thing? I don't know what's wrong or-- or-- what's okay to do--"

"So far you have done absolutely nothing wrong. At all. Except try so fucking hard to keep your fucking clothes on and being such a fucking tease."

Rosa winces. Mindfang shushes her by planting a kiss on her head, just between her horns. "And I still want to do nothing but fuck you senseless. So can we please not spend all of today analyzing every second of last night?"

"...Was I really good?"

"No, you were awful. I faked your orgasm so I could go to sleep already." Mindfang snaps, a little more harshly than Rosa had expected when she'd ventured that question. She's clearly reached her coddling limit for the hour, but Rosa still can't resist pushing the envelope a few centimeters further. After all, her face gets so... well... perfect when she's annoyed. When she's angry her face scrunches up so that little lines that are reminiscent of sand patterned by the current spread across it, and her eyes catching fire like the glow of a light from the depths of the ocean that lures sailors to their watery graves.

It's a very attractive look on her, really. So attractive that Rosa forgets that she's not sure how much she wants Mindfang getting anywhere near her nook in the bare light of day because oh dear is that exhilarating.

"I don't understand how you could fake my orgasm--" Rosa says, slowly, contorting her face as if she's truly confused about what Mindfang's saying. It's not hard. She's rather good at that face; so good that Mindfang hasn't quite discerned when to dismiss it and when to acknowledge it.

"I WAS BEING SARCASTIC." Mindfang snarls. "I think you would know if I faked your orgasm."

"I don't know what an orgasm feels like, it's entirely possible you just implied that I achieved orgasm and how would I know any better."

"Rosa. You're already on pretty thin ice over the whole 'you're not a real pirate since you haven't tied
me down and ravished me' debacle-- let's not forget about the whole 'I don't know what oral sex is' thing don't try to tell me I didn't give you the best damn orgasm you ever had."

"That's not much of an achievement. It was the only orgasm I ever had. Supposedly."

"...Yeah that's it, I'm taking my revenge."

"You don't say?" Rosa purrs, slipping out of her grasp back into the water. Mindfang's face softens into a wicked smirk and she gives Rosa a decidedly aroused once-over. Her one moment of being a successful seductress is ruined, however, when she processes just how hot the shower is. And screams.

Mindfang screams in response which seems more than a little silly given that as the more dominant, not to mention the higher blooded partner means that she should be protecting her at all times. Not that Rosa wishes to force societal norms to control her behavior or anything so untoward but-- well--

She wouldn't mind having someone take care of her for once. And if the only way she can assuage her conscience into accepting this is to pretend that society mandates it be so... she's not ashamed to say that she'll do it.

Mindfang follows her under the water without a trace of pain on her face. She gives Rosa a haughty stare and snorts a little. "What's wrong with you? It's not that hot. A little warm but not any hotter than a good bath--"

"Are you insane, Vienna?" She snaps, immediately adjusting the temperature. "Look at me!"

The moment the words are out of her mouth, she realizes her mistake. Still, she gestures repeatedly at the swarm of 3rd degree burns that have cropped up in bright green all over her neck, back and arms where the water touched her.

"Oh, believe me, Pet," Mindfang says, smugly, even as she ducks her head under the water and ends up looking like a drenched poodle instead of a sexy pirate. "I am looking at you and I am very satisfied with my purchase."

Rosa chooses to ignore this in favor of pointing at her burned skin. Mindfang gives her a long-suffering stare as if to say 'yes, and?' which isn't exactly caring behavior out of one's flushed interest.

Not that Mindfang is her flushed interest, of course. Because. Well. She isn't. This isn't a romance. This is something else. Even if Mindfang's in love with her that doesn't mean she's obligated to feel the same way.

"I'm cold, Rosa. Stop looking like a startled dolphin and get over here and warm me up."

"Not until you turn the water down!" Rosa insists, slapping her hands away when she reaches for her. Mindfang whines, a wholly endearing sound that makes her heart twinge. She shuffles forward despite her better urges, and allows Mindfang to embrace her once more.

Once she's forced to endure it, the water doesn't seem nearly as hot. It stings her skin, of course, but when she's in Mindfang's arms she can feel the goosebumps that cover her flesh-- which makes it rather difficult to be... difficult about it.

It's easy to forget, sometimes, that she's not impervious to all hurts. Rosa would like to have a proper chat with someone who knows more about the hemospectrum beyond its social injustices; while she might know the political implications of Mindfang's cerulean blood she knows nothing about the biological ones and heavens is she cold. Is there something she should be doing to keep her warm?

"Pet? Pay attention." Mindfang waves a damp hand in her face, sending a few drops of water into her eyes.

"Sorry, Mistress," Rosa says, absently. Mindfang wordlessly hands her a bar of soap and Rosa, equally as wordlessly, begins to scrub her down. Mindfang submits to the attention without any shame, angling herself as needed until Rosa's satisfied she's clean.

"You next." Mindfang mutters, making a hand gesture that screams 'gimme that soap' or, perhaps, 'let me feel your breasts'. It could go either way with her.

"Not until we do your hair." Rosa says, firmly, pretending that she's not petrified at the thought of Mindfang's hands all over her, covering every last square millimeter of flesh with soap because she knows Mindfang will use any excuse to feel her up. "It needs to be washed. You're disgusting."

"Fine," Mindfang mutters, quickly bending her neck enough that Rosa can work properly. It's a nice look on her. Humble, almost. It's quite the change.

"When's the last time you've brushed properly?" Rosa scolds and Mindfang groans, loudly.

"Honestly, Rosa, what do you have against my hair--"

"You have beautiful hair and you insist on ignoring the work that needs to be done in order to make it it's best. Just a little bit of brushing and some decent deep conditioning would really make all the difference--"

"Just out of curiosity, if I shoved you up against the wall and started to fuck your brains out, would it hinder this tirade at all?"

"Not in the least."

"Mmm, now, how did I see that answer coming?" Mindfang mutters, a little more sarcastically than Rosa thinks it absolutely necessary. "I guessssssss it's okay. You're allowed to have this one flaw."

"Yes." Rosa deadpans, yanking Mindfang's head back up so quickly she squalls. She glares at her, eyebrows angled steeply towards her pupils. "My one flaw is that I'm obsessed with taking care of you."

Mindfang seems oddly embarrassed by this, quickly adverting her eyes from Rosa's own and going an incredibly attractive shade of blue. She never thought she'd find blue so arousing. But she does. "Yes, well... I think you've accused me of the same. So... Truce?"

"Only if you promise me breakfast." Rosa says, smoothing what feels like a half bottle of creme rinse through the body of her hair into her scalp. Mindfang makes an anxious noise at the feel of it and tries to pull away.

"Of course, Pet." Mindfang murmurs, sticking her head back under the water. "Whatever makes you happy."

Rosa knows that's meant to be a slight but she takes it as a victory all the same. She finishes showering before Mindfang does and is, therefore, the first to leave the room. She wraps herself up in one of the towels and dries off as quickly as she can because-- well-- Mindfang's staring at her.

"Stop." She mutters, slapping at the glass and wincing at the reverberation. "Stop looking at me."
"No." Mindfang mutters, smirking. "I won't. I think you're underestimating just how powerful I am, Rosa. Don't go thinking you can give me orders."

"Of course not, Mistress," Rosa murmurs, giving her a sly little smirk. "You are expressly in charge at all times. My feelings and personal wishes have absolutely no bearing on my behavior. I solely acknowledge your will."

"Ugh, no that would be so boring." Mindfang's voice is distorted by the pattering of shower water on the marble but Rosa's still able to detect the note of anger that surfaces. She's also able to admire the way she looks naked. Which is, in fact, just as good as she looks clothed. "I can make anyone do whatever I want whenever I feel like it. You're worth more than that."

"Am I?" Rosa murmurs, not meaning for it to sound self-depreciating but realizing, belatedly, that of course it sounds that way. If she had half a brain she'd have ducked from the room before Mindfang had a chance to say anything but now she's about to be lectured--

"Oi." Mindfang turns the water off with an angry squeak of a dial. She steps out into the bathroom without bothering to wring the excess water from her hair and then, soon enough, there's a small lake forming beneath her feet.

"Darling girl." She mutters, pulling her another towel around herself. "I respect you enough that I'm bossing you around and threatening you instead of doing things the easy way."

Rosa sighs. Oh dear heavens not this again. Yes, Mistress, I understand. You are able to snap my brain in half with the barest of thoughts. You can enslave my mind with the slightest of blinks. I understand this fact.

She knows the tirade at this point. It's never been amusing. It's never going to be amusing. Or at all comforting. So she does the only thing she can think off to ward her off.

With a deep breath and more misgivings than an estranged Moirail buying her partner a perigees eve gift from the clearance section at a store she hates, she drops her towel.

"--And while I am, of course, quite capable of forcing your mind to fit a mold entirely of my own creation, to mold you into a perfect mate-- Excuse me, are you naked?"

"Yes."

"...Do you want me to do something about it?" Mindfang asks, slowly, her eyes going absolutely wicked with anticipation a warm, rich blue like a blanket of nightfall. She pads across the space of the bathroom on the balls of her feet. Rosa shies away slightly but manages to hold her ground, somehow. It's the fourth hardest thing she's ever asked herself to do.

"I don't know, Mistress. What do you think?" Rosa asks, praying that she doesn't look stupid. She arches her neck back and stretches her neck from side to side. Mindfang replies by reaching out and trailing her fingers across Rosa's exposed throat and moaning.

Mindfang gives her a fantastic smirk. She traces her way down Rosa's figure, fingers lingering at her breasts and then at her waist. She squeezes her waist, softly, and makes a cheerful noise. "I thought you wanted breakfast?"

"It can wait." Rosa murmurs, nuzzling her. Mindfang nuzzles back and moans sweetly.

"...No. No, it can't." Mindfang sighs, heavily, and goes in for a kiss. Rosa kisses her back for the brief second she can before Mindfang pulls away. "But if you feel the same way tonight, I'll be more
than happy to take you up on that offer."

Rosa sighs. It's a fake sigh, however; she's found herself far hungrier than usual for the morning and when Mindfang hauls her over her shoulder and throws her onto the bed, she doesn't attempt to continue her distraction.

* * *

It takes them a bit longer than expected to dress properly; drying Mindfang's hair is an expedition unto itself and it's only with the offer of bribery that she's coerced into sitting still long enough to get a good brushing.

Which-- well-- does make her sound like a rather unruly pet but Rosa doesn't allow herself to feel back about that. Considering that Mindfang treats her like a domesticated animal so often she supposes an unspoken mental image of Mindfang as a large unruly dog refusing to be groomed is hardly the most offensive thing in the world.

Still, finally getting Mindfang complacent in front of a vanity is an achievement of many months and she's hardly not about to let her go without attempting to re-establish order. It only takes a few minutes to get her hair carefully twisted up and pinned to the crown of her head. She even makes appropriate concessions to her quasi-royal status and secures a sapphire brooch into her still damp curls.

The jewels gleam in the morning light while she dresses herself, pulling on a gorgeous royal blue dress that goes to mid-calf and then pairs it with a long cardigan trimmed in lace that swishes around her like a cape while she attempts to finish getting ready. She puts on earrings and a necklace that look expensive enough to buy a house, heavy and yet somehow elegant all the same.

Rosa dresses far more quickly, pulling on a dress the color of the ocean at sunrise. It's nowhere close to her own blood color but, well, when she tugs at Mindfang's arm to distract her from her reflection, her Mistress doesn't do anything but stare.

"Pretty girl," Mindfang purrs, giving her a predatory stare. "Pretty girl."

"You only think I'm pretty because I'm wearing your colors," Rosa says, absently, pulling on a black sweater.

"You're basically wearing a giant sign that says you belong to me--" Mindfang tries to explain but Rosa cuts her off with a sharp noise. She doesn't need an explanation of how wearing another troll's blood color is paramount to posting a banns and hosting a ceremony.

"Is that vastly different from the large necklace I've been wearing that actually said I belonged to you?" She mutters, crankily, straightening Mindfang's cardigan until she's satisfied it's draping off of her breasts correctly. "I'm hungry."

"In the future I'm going to have to bring you breakfast in bed, aren't I?"

"Yes." Rosa says, pretending that she doesn't want to immediately ask what's next in their sex life. "I want coffee. And-- and--"

"Whatever you want, Pet." Mindfang says, lavishly, kissing her face about a half-dozen times. It's the most condescending thing she's ever done.

"Toast." She decides, frowning a little. "Toast that I don't make. That's exactly what I want."
"...Oh Rosa." Mindfang groans, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Pet, I'm going to get you the best breakfast money can buy you and then we'll see how much you want toast."

* * *

They eat breakfast on a terrace that overlooks a cliff face so sheer it takes Rosa's breath away. The ocean far, far below shimmers like some great unknown hand sprinkled it with sugar and she can't stop gazing like-- like--

Well. Like-- She bites her lip. She wants to think his name. She wants to form the two syllables with her brain, the two syllables that she lived and breathed for over three decades. She wants them to form on the surface of her brain, those six simple letters forming a name even a child could muster.

But she can't. As much as she wants to, she can't; to know his name is to know him again and while she's... getting there... she's not ready to say it.

So she stares out across the ocean like her son the first time he saw the night stars and chased moths across the warm desert sands.

"You silly silly darling." Mindfang laughs from beside her as Rosa hangs over the wrought iron railing. "You've seen the ocean."

"But it's so big." Rosa says, laughing. "I didn't know it was so big."

"Hmph. You'll be saying that when you see my bulge too." Mindfang mutters and Rosa stops gazing to give her a bashful glare. It's enough of a pointed comment to get her to sit down, however, and they proceed to have a veritable feast.

Things she had forgotten about in the past fifty or so years: waffles, bacon, eggs prepared in more than one way, fresh oranges, grapefruits, pancakes and troll frech toast.

Why it's called troll french toast she doesn't know but-- well-- it's her new favorite thing. The way the hotel serves it, it's covered in brown sugar and is just crunchy enough to be delectable. Rosa eats more of it than she thought she could and then somehow finds room for blueberry coffee cake.

"I have never seen you eat like that," Mindfang mutters over the rim of her teacup. "You should do that more. Bulk up a little."

Rosa gives her a little smile. Mindfang reaches out and squeezes her wrist. "It's good food that I didn't have to make. I'll eat as much as I can."

"You silly," Mindfang says with an derisive snort. "You don't have to bring me breakfast, you know-- I did just fine before you came along."

That hurts, unexpectedly. Rosa sets down her fork and does her best not to look as if she's just had all of her teeth brutally removed. She doesn't succeed because, well, Mindfang immediately looks as if she's just been asked to remove all of her clothes and recite a limerick in public. Or. Well. Something that Mindfang wouldn't do in a thousand years. Still, she gives Rosa a look.

"Pet, I'm not going to lie to you and pretend I need you." She shrugs, pouring herself more tea. "I don't need you. I want you. I like having you around; you're good company and you're not half bad to look at. But do I need you to bring me coffee every morning and make my bed? Not really. I'm a fully grown woman, Rosa, I'm quite capable of those things."

"Then why keep me."
"Stop making that face, you know it only makes me horny." No. No she did not know that. Rosa's pout quickly turns into a scowl. "I'm keeping you around because I like you and so does Marcus."

"But if you don't need me--"

"Who cares? Does it make that much of a difference?" Mindfang grumbles. "Want is better than need because I'm not obligated to keep you."

"I don't like that."

"Relax, Rosa, I never get rid of anything I want." Mindfang mutters, laughing a little. She passes Rosa another muffin and makes a gesture that clearly implores her to eat. "Except that muffin. But I'm using it to make a person I want happy."

"I don't like being compared to a pastry." Rosa mutters, huffing until her hair blows out of her face. "It makes me feel like you're going to devour me."

"Oh but my dear of course I am." Mindfang purrs, kicking off a shoe and rubbing the ball of her boot up and down Rosa's bare calf. "Pet, why does it matter so much?"

"I-- I need to be needed-- how can you not need me--"

"Look, Rosa, it's not that I don't appreciate your overwhelming need to perform menial tasks to make my life easier. But I just want you around."

"But you don't need me--"

"ROSA I HAD TO GET MYSELF OFF LAST NIGHT AFTER WE HAD SEX. DO YOU UNDERSTAND HOW SIGNIFICANT THAT IS!?"

"Would you quiet down?" Rosa gasps, utterly horrified when the rest of the breakfasters out on the terrace abruptly fall silent and stare. "I'm just saying--"

"I need you only in so much as I would hate to lose you. If you want to do nothing more than lie in bed and fuck me all day, it's perfectly fine." Mindfang finishes off her tea and then takes her muffin back from Rosa's plate. Rosa stabs her with a fork and snatches it back.

"That's what you would call a sex slave." Rosa snaps and Mindfang gives her a ridiculous smirk.

"So you've got a choice, Pet. Be my paramour because I want you or be my sex slave because I need you." Mindfang says, grinning at her with an expression that clearly is meant to say 'I won this battle with nothing more than my breasts and my gorgeous hair'.

"Well--"

"Keep in mind, darling, if you say you want to be my sex slave I'll hold you to it."

"That's not exactly the worst threat I've heard all day." Rosa murmurs, quietly, raising her eyebrows and trying to look... what's the phrase? Smug? Confident? One of those things. "For the scourge of the seas, you're hardly as intimidating in bed as expected."

"What were you expecting, exactly." Mindfang grumbles, narrowing her eyes and all but kicking Rosa in the ankle. She just digs her toes in hard and when Rosa makes a noise of acute distress in the back of her throat she immediately winces and pulls away.

She shrugs and gives Mindfang a confident stare despite the fact she knows she's sticking her face
into boiling water, so to speak. "A lot more rope. Possibly an eye patch. Maybe, in the best scenario-"

"Best with an eight?" Mindfang asks, flirtily, despite the absolutely unromantic content of her question.

"Yes, dear, with an eight-- there would be a parrot."

"Is the eye patch negotiable? Because I am a sexy pirate, I don't do prosthetic limbs and eye patches. That's hardly becoming of a lady of my status in the world." She tosses her head to make this point, earrings jangling with the motion.

"Eye patch is negotiable, yes." Rosa gives her a challenging stare. She challenges her right back, giving her a look that's-- well-- sexy as all hell. "But I would be dishonest if I didn't admit to finding the rugged, battle-worn pirate a bit more attractive than the perfectly coiffed one."

"You do you know I'm serious about showing you just how much of a pirate I am."

"I'm going to hold you to that," Rosa mutters. "At least you need me to piss you off."

Mindfang takes a vindictive bite of her toast. "Exactly."

* * *

They leave the hotel's dining terrace via a small path that meanders along the cliff face. Mindfang holds her hand excruciatingly tightly the entire walk, as if she's afraid Rosa will take a sudden dive into the ocean miles below. Rosa clings back, far more afraid of the water now that there isn't anything but her own coordination keeping her from falling.

Eventually they make it safely into the courtyard outside of the hotel. Mindfang, however, doesn't slacken her grip. Rosa stands as close to her as she can without hindering Mindfang's ability to walk.

Neither of them say anything for a good few blocks. Mindfang seems far too focused on her thoughts to remember Rosa's there and Rosa's content to spend all her time attempting to forget that they had sex last night. Not that she didn't enjoy it, of course but-- well-- she can't stop thinking about it.

It's really hard to stop thinking about it. It's also not nearly as fun not to think about it--

"We're going to have sex again, aren't we?"

"Oh, of course we will Pet. Probably quite a bit, I imagine." Mindfang says, absently, turning to give her a grin. "Why? Do we need to find a convenient park bench?"

"What is wrong with you!?"

Mindfang laughs. And keeps laughing until she's in high spirits once more, teasing Rosa until she's blushing so greenly she's the color of un-mown grass and making so many puns she really should be punished.

Her Mistress staunchly refuses to answer any questions about where they're going; she navigates the streets full of vine-draped houses with the ease of someone who's been there hundreds of times and is only a mortgage payment away from being a resident.

"Darling girl," Mindfang grumbles when Rosa asks for a thirteenth time where they're going. "You'll know when we get there."
Rosa rolls her eyes. Mindfang rolls her eyes back. It's awfully childish but Rosa still wants to do nothing more than kiss her desperately.

Eventually, they make their way into a large, open plaza that's paved with white granite. There's a towering fountain in the middle reaching up towards the sky above. The water flowing from it is clear and chirps happily as it flows downward. There's a massive building towering behind it, however, wrought from white marble that gleams like falling stars in the sun.

"Ever been to the Imperial Portrait Gallery?" Mindfang whispers, tugging at her hand. "Because it's pretty kickass."

"...Are you taking me to another museum?"

"Yes, but it's the 8EST museum."

"You just said that with an eight, didn't you?"

"YES OF COURSE I DID, ROSA." Mindfang shouts, dragging her past the fountain towards the steps. Rosa follows her, reluctantly. No because she's not eager to see the museum because, of course, she wants nothing more.

Well. She wants some things more, but she's awfully excited for the museum as well. But an Imperial Museum will be guarded by Imperial Guards and Imperial Guards guarding Imperial Museums are usually on temporary leave for non-incapacitating injuries and she's reasonably sure she's responsible for many of those injuries and-- well--

If she has to pick between having a Mindfang to take home or seeing some pretty pictures before she's eviscerated... she's glad to say she'll take the Mindfang.

Except, as they make their way up the stairs, Rosa realizes that there isn't a single living soul on the plaza. Not even a pigeon or a-- a-- stray cat or a vagrant or anyone.

Her first instinct is that, well, Mindfang's setting her up to be murdered and the square has been cleared to prevent innocent bystanders from getting caught in the crossfire. But then, of course, she remembers that the Empire is hardly afraid of killing its own citizens to capture a criminal.

Either way, she's uncomfortable. She stares up at the building before her with a mixture of awe and horror. It's a big museum. Gargantuan, in fact, and completely empty. Rosa doesn't want to go inside; there's no reason a place this size should be abandoned unless no one is allowed to be there. But Mindfang presses forward like she notices absolutely nothing amiss and she's forced to follow.

As they approach the front door it becomes more and more obvious that no one is inside and Rosa panics because like hell is she about to be accessory to robbing an art museum; she likes art.

"Mistress," Rosa murmurs, her voice low and anxious. "Mistress, I think it's closed."

"Hush, pet." Mindfang says, with a sharp gesture. "We're fine. What's wrong with you? Why would I bring you to a closed museum?"

"Because you didn't know it was closed?" Rosa ventures, softly. Mindfang scoffs, loudly, clearly unwilling to admit that this is even a possibility.

"Darling Pet, don't you trust me?" Mindfang murmurs, taking her hand and curling her fingers through Rosa's own. Her hand is cold, despite the balmy warmth of the sunlit streets just a few yards away and Rosa instinctively clutches to her.
"I'll take that as a yes, you silly girl." Mindfang says with a rumble of teasing. "I'll have you know that I made special plans for you today."

Rosa laughs and nuzzles into Mindfang's side affectionately. Mindfang nuzzles her back until they're moments away from dissolving into a hapless make out session. "Why? Were you not planning on having sex with me until tonight?"

"..." Her pause is simply too long to be believable that she can say anything other than yes. "To be fair, Rosa, to be fair neither of us thought you'd be the one to make the first move."

"Hardly the first move." Rosa says with a sniff. "And what happened to not pressuring me?"

"There is a difference between my wanting you to fuck me on your own terms and letting you take your sweet time."

"So the plan was... have a romantic seaside brunch, go to an art museum and... I... I don't even know how sex would calculate into this."

"Shut up Rosa. I was sort of figuring you'd be overcome by my clearly loving efforts and put out."

Rosa wrinkles her nose and laughs. The sound echoes throughout the room and it's jarring when it returns to her ears. "Did you just say put out?"

"There was going to be dinner. And dessert." Mindfang mumbles, clearly ashamed of herself-- at least, somewhat. "Don't be mad. I'm still going through with my romantic plans, aren't I?"

Well. Yes. She is. She is going through with it. "Well. I suppose it's the thought that counts? So what if the museum is closed-- let's head back to that bookstore and--"

Mindfang reaches out and opens the door. It's not locked. In fact, when it swings open, a sign that says "Museum Closed for Review by Marquise of the Eighth Ward" comes into view.

Mindfang gives her a smug smile and helps her up the last steps to the front door.

"I'm the Marquise of the Eighth Ward." Mindfang murmurs, shrugging a little. "The Eighth ward handles arts and cultural preservation, Pet. If I want to spend a day privately assessing a government collection, I will do so."

"I thought you were a pirate." Rosa says, softly, giving her a little smile and trying not to panic over the fact that she's an actual Marquise not a-- well-- falsely titled one. "This hardly seems like a fitting side job."

"Oi. Oi-- you saw how much shit I keep in my hold. What the hell did you think I was going to do with all of that artwork? Use it as kindling?"

Rosa shudders. Mindfang gives her a look that says 'I know, right?'. It's a moment of connection that shouldn't be nearly as meaningful as it feels. But it creates a feeling of happiness that diffuses through her body. It's glorious to feel like she's got someone on her side again. Not necessarily in any meaningful way but-- well--

It's nice not to have to explain herself. It's nice to convey what she feels with nothing more than a gesture, not having to worry about finding words for what she loves.

"C'mon. Want a private tour from the woman who owns the place?" Mindfang offers her an arm, quite gallantly. Rosa takes it with a smile, curling her fingers around Mindfang's elbow and
snuggling close. Mindfang gives her a cheery trill and nuzzles her.

"In the spirit of full disclosure, Mistress," Rosa says, dryly, raising her eyebrows. "I wouldn't have surrendered my maidenhood simply because you showed me a few paintings."

"Ahhhhhhhh, but Rosa, you haven't seen these paintings." Mindfang purrs, kissing her temple. A sneaky hand climbs around her waist and Rosa squeaks a little. "You'd be surprised at what the Empire lets me keep in here."

Rosa giggles a little. Mindfang grins back.

"...So Marquise isn't, um, just a fancy name then?" She asks, quietly, as they walk into the lobby. It's all golden marble and soaring stained glass windows;

"No, sadly, it is an inherited title. And it is my job to curate the arts and culture of the Empire." Mindfang pauses and frowns a little. "Sort of. When I feel like it. And. Well. I feel like it now."

Rosa gives her a blank stare. She fails to elaborate. "Explain, please?" She asks, trying not to let aggravation taint her voice.

"Most aristocratic positions are sort of... well... fake, Rosa. We have them and we use them when we see fit, but most of the work is done by whoever we can pay to do it." She kicks the door open and gives Rosa a fond smile. "But I do supply the Imperial museums with a good amount of art and artifacts so I do more than most."

"I'm sure you do, dear," Rosa murmurs. And then they're inside.

The museum is absolutely... well... she's never seen anything like it. She thought their hotel was the pinnacle of elegance and higher living. Apparently, she doesn't have as good of taste as she thought she had because this museum is clearly fare more beautiful. Everything is just-- well-- a work of art.

The floors are a russet marble polished to a brilliant gleam and the walls are so high that she can barely make out the details of the frescoes that cover the ceilings. There's chandeliers wrought from brass and crystal that sparkle in the muted light filtering through the frosted glass of the windows and-- well-- there's no place she can look that's not so beautiful she wants to cry. The wainscoting has been gilded to a golden gleam and she almost feels as if she's been pulled from the hectic bustle of the city and taken to someplace straight from her most desperate fantasies. Quiet. Serene. Beautiful. Free of anything but the most beautiful of things.

"Shouldn't there be security?" Rosa murmurs, squeezing Mindfang's hand as tightly as she can without snapping a joint. "Don't you, um, have people?"

"Sweetheart, I don't mean to upset you but you're one of the most wanted women on the face of the planet. There isn't anyone here but you, I and the acting Curator."

"...Can we play tag?" Rosa asks in a tiny voice, staring around the gargantuan empty space of the entry hall with her eyes wide.

Mindfang gives her a look that's not exactly horrified but is still decidedly scandalized. She's not quite sure why; there's no statues or objects d' arte to be destroyed. Just. Perhaps. Some dignity. "Rosa, no, we're not children."

"Please?" Rosa kisses her. Mindfang makes a noise of utter indecision. "Please, darling?"

"...Just one round." Mindfang mumbles, sighing. "I swear to fuck, Rosa, you're impossible."
"I want to have fun for once." She mutters in response. "Anyways, you're it."

* * *

Mindfang, it turns out, is terrible at playing tag. Or she pretends to be terrible in order to make Rosa happy. It takes at least twenty minutes for them to finish playing and-- well-- it's fun and when Mindfang finally seizes her around the waist and spins her around, they're both laughing.

"Come along," Mindfang pants, straightening up. "I brought you here for a reason, Pet. Don't you want to see the finest art I have to offer you?"

"I feel like I should take this opportunity to make a sexually charged comment." Rosa mumbles, awkwardly. "But I can't think of one."

Mindfang laughs and takes her hand once more. "You'll have a chance to think of one while we're exploring the museum."

Rosa takes her hand.

Mindfang leads the way into the gallery of Portraits of the Peers of the Empire. The wing is sprawling and Rosa can barely see the end of it; Mindfang says it will take them a good three hours to "get acquainted" and Rosa has the sudden sinking feeling that once she's gotten Mindfang started in tour guide mode, stopping her might require a truly troll herculean effort to make her cease.

Or, perhaps she can simply take her clothes off. That might be just as effective. It certainly worked this morning.

As they begin to walk forward, footsteps echoing in the empty space, Mindfang begins to explain what they're seeing. Her voice is low and mellifluous, just as rich and delectable as the finest honey.

According to her Mistress, the floors are arranged in order of importance, with the most recently deceased-- or still living-- members of society's portraits at the beginning and their very first ancestors towards the end. Mindfang explains to her, in the voice of a woman tired of saying the same thing over and over again, that the term "ancestor" is used very roughly in most cases, intended to indicate an "ancestry" of rank, not blood. There are, she says, very few genetic lines that can be tracked. Eleven of them, to be precise.

"Ten, since the Sisters don't exactly count, but I count them anyways." Mindfang adds, with an awkwardness to her voice that makes Rosa laugh. Good. She doesn't like to think of any of her Sisters as somehow special. But Mindfang's making a concession to try to make her happy and-- well-- it means something.

The first floor is all your standard government officials and important scholars-- brave women and men who have done glorious things in service of their Empress... but not that glorious that they deserve a crest or the sanctimonious honor of Her trident resting on their shoulders. Rosa likes looking at their portraits, at faces that are still fresh and bright with the realization that they're someone who did something and they'll be remembered for it, one day.

There are, of course, portraits of men and women who have done things she doesn't admire. It's safe to say that Mindfang elaborates on the paintings of women who developed specific breakthroughs in linguistics and dialect instead of the one of the woman who first developed a more efficient system of hemotyping.

The second floor is devoted to those who have a position in the ranks of nobility-- not Warded nobility with entire sections of the nation under their observation or members of the Admiralty who
have achieved nobility through great feats of physical virtue, but nobles who woke up to their money without responsibility. Rosa likes these portraits too.

The clothes are a little more interesting, the lineages a little longer and the stories more fascinating. Mindfang spins a particularly interesting tale about members of opposing bloodlines who started an all-out war against one another about a small lapdog that accidentally got dyed pink when someone spilled wine on him and sixteen fatalities occurred at the next dinner party when someone got retribution by soaking the household's cat in a vat of blueberries.

They spend far longer on that floor, eventually stopping to rest in a room designed for seminars to take place in. It has been three hours, astoundingly, and even worse Rosa's not even beginning to tire. It takes a shocking amount to wear her out these days and Mindfang's not about to be fooled by fake yawns-- even if she were legitimately bored enough to attempt them.

Even in the empty seminar room, with white walls and a chalkboard waiting for notes to be scrawled across it, Mindfang finds things to talk about, her face perpetually lit up like a candle in a dark room, eyes wide and full of a vivaciousness Rosa's only seen when they were out on the open ocean, with nothing but sea between them and the horizon. Rosa can't help but beam at her in a way that makes Mindfang blush just a little darker every few minutes until she's a gabbling mess that only occasionally drops pieces of vocabulary that are at all related to painting or artwork.

The third floor, however, is where things get just a little more... fascinating. These are the top guns, the Empresses, the Consorts, the Admirals and the Warded Nobility. Rosa knows very little about the Wards, beyond the fact that each of the nine wards oversee a good portion of the Empire and have authority there second only to the Empress. They're ministers of things, she knows, defense, agriculture, tourism (as if much of that occurs) and... some other things. Bloodshed? Torture? Hemocide? She doesn't know.

Mindfang doesn't go to the Ward portraits first, giving the hallway a knowing scowl that makes Rosa dimly suspicious until she recollects that the Orphaner must have a portrait there.

They wander through hallways covered in portraits of highbloods who all look more than a little pissed off, holding objects that symbolize their chosen domains. It's all rather uninteresting since all Mindfang seems to want to say about them is that they're boring and she hates them. They wend their way through the first through fifth wards in this fashion, Rosa growing gradually more uncomfortable as things go on and Mindfang stops playing the cheerful tour guide and starts to seem more than a little grumpy.

That is, of course until they turn a corner and they're greeted with a sea of green. The corridor is long and every portrait of every woman is more or less the same-- tall, horned and wearing the long, striped mantle of a Sister.

"Oh for the love of--" Rosa huffs, tugging on Mindfang's arm in a halfhearted attempt to make her stop moving forward. "What is this? Can't we skip it?"

"The Sister's portraits." Mindfang says, eyebrows rising. "What? You don't know about these? Didn't you have to sit for one? What did you think was going to happen with that? They're not about to burn them."

Rosa stares at her, horrified, her throat going utterly dry. She dimly remembers the day after she woke up on the Adult planet-- before they led her underground-- being fitted for her robes, being told to hold a lantern and a scythe and stand there without smiling.

Yes. Yes she knows about these but she doesn't like these or enjoy actively acknowledging them.
"They're meant to be the last time the Sister's faces see the light of day." Rosa murmurs, frowning. "If... if we live long enough to be released back into the world no one is ever meant to see us unveiled."

Mindfang snorts and starts off down the corridor at an energetic clip. "I'm going to find you. I am going to find little eighteen year old Rosa and I am going to mock you relentlessly."

"No. Mistress-- Mistress-- no-- Vienna--" Rosa begs, watching her dash off with a helpless keen. "Vienna, please--"

Mindfang, true to form, does not listen. Rosa, until this moment, had not been at all upset about the fact that they have the museum to themselves. Now she's wishing that a guard would come by and kick them both out. She never saw her portrait. Nor does she want to see it. It should remain where it is-- unseen and forgotten and, if there's any goodness in the world, dusty.

But Mindfang does not share this apprehension of being forced to look her own failures in the face. Probably because there isn't a painting of herself at eighteen hanging anywhere nearby.

"Vienna--" She begs, the name burning her lips like Cayenne pepper the more she says it. "Vienna, please--"

Her Mistress is moving at a quick pace, boot heels clicking like a metronome on the flawless white marble floor. The portraits on either side of the wall are held in gorgeous, hand-carved frames that have been gilded to a gleam and, underneath the crystal chandeliers and beside diamond paned windows, the Sisters standing within the frames look utterly alien. She's used to seeing these women silhouetted by dark, craggy walls and tall shadows. They all look so bizarre, with faces that are dark, solemn and lined with the knowledge that they're about to become a part of something eternal. Dark backdrops of forest green velvet, ornamental scythes, lanterns-- and those dreadful ceremonial robes.

Whoever designed those deserves to be burned at the stake. Rosa glowered at all of the women wearing the same green-striped mantle that flutters around them like a possessed cloud, skirts that are too tight to let them reach a full stride when culling the monsters that prey on the grubs-- or the grubs themselves. There's a line of jet buttons going up the back of them, too, that make it utterly impossible for anyone to put their own clothes on.

And those shoulder pads. She hates those shoulder pads. Hates in the present tense because she still hates them, even though she'll never have to wear them again. They stuck out far too far from her body, snagging on things, the mantle ripping and needing repairs every day--

They only wore them on special occasions, thank heavens. When sent above ground to bless dedications of new temples in honor of the Empress, to add authenticity to aristocratic ceremonies of Matespritship and Kismesisitude-- nothing too exiting, but requiring those fucking robes.

And, of course, the days when the Empress or Highblood would appear to give their newest descendants a good inspection and decide whether or not they'd pass muster. They all had to dress up those days. It was awful and uncomfortable and someone almost always ended up getting eaten.

But every other day of their lives, every other day living buried alive-- those days, they wore whatever they felt like. Usually black dresses with high necks, long sleeves and hemlines and made from warm, cozy wool.

Seeing all these paintings is reminding her just how little she enjoyed those days. Just how much she
hated being trapped down there like a rat in a cage--

"Oh hot damn." Mindfang's voice rockets around the room like a sneeze in a graveyard. "Rosa, get over here--"

Rosa groans in utter horror. Mindfang's beckoning her over with an urgency that can only indicate she's found something incriminating. She moves as slowly as she can and, well, Mindfang doesn't like that.

When she's at Mindfang's side, she absolutely refuses to look at the portrait.

"My my isn't she gorgeous." Mindfang groans, her voice full of lust that's absolutely crippling. Rosa knows that voice-- well, after last night she knows that voice.

"I'm glad you find one of our number pleasing, Mistress." Rosa says as bitterly as possible. Mindfang elbows her, hard, in the ribs.

"Oh, shut up and look at her. Then tell me if you ever snuck a kiss in the hallway so that we can pretend to have the same taste in women."

"Caves," Rosa corrects, sighing, and trying to murder the jealous rage blooming inside of her at the fact that Mindfang might very well be hitting on someone she worked with for years. "All illicit behavior occurred in caves."

Mindfang snorts and curls an arm around her waist protectively. "Rosa--Girl. Fantasies: mine."

Rosa huffs but blinks up. It can't be that bad, can it? At the worst it will be Davina and then Mindfang will get huffy and move on. It takes her a few moments to register who it actually is, and then has to blink again.

"Her? You like her?" Rosa asks, horrified.

"Do you know her?" Mindfang asks, eagerly. "Please tell me you knew her--"

The portrait stares at her, absolutely unforgiving in it's stark colors. Rosa stares back and swallows past the sudden dizziness as the blood plummets out of her brain.

"I knew her." Rosa says, unsure of the words coming out of her mouth. It feels like she's trying to
form them around a handful of dice, her tongue refusing to shape the angles of the syllables. "I... I knew her."

The face staring back at her is intimately familiar, even if it looks strangely distorted by now. It's fuller, more fleshed out and she has breasts that can be very easily described as luscious. And she's more than a little exiting looking, bared hands covered in black inky swirls and ears covered in gold rings; there's piercings in her eyebrows and lips and one in her nose. Rosa knows for a fact that there's a pair of rings going through her breasts and one in her navel and that those black markings continue all over her body--

Yes, she knew her. Her name was Annora. And she knew she was going to die and she was going out with as much of a fight as she could muster. And she'd bit the Sisters who had taken the rings from her body and, well-- it didn't take long to make her give up. She'd tried.

But...Years spent in darkness, so far away from the sun... Cripplingly alone... Suffocating under the weight of the millions of tons of rock above her head...

It didn't take much to break her. And staring back into her own eyes, her own young, sparkling eyes- it makes her feel so ashamed. Because the teenager staring back at her with defiant brows and a wicked smile... she's... well, she's beautiful and unafraid of what the world will throw at her. And she'd swore she'd never give up, not for anything or anyone. No matter what.

And now, she's not a woman broken before she's reached middle age. Barely out of the 'young adult' stage of her life and she's already ready to die-- She's already tried to die, already failed at everything she's turned her hand to; failed as a Sister and as a mother and, well, most certainly as a slave.

"Yes, I knew her," She says, voice as lifeless as her son the moment they pierced him with an arrow. "Her name was Annora. And she died young."

Mindfang glances between the two of them; Annora and the Dolorosa. She does it again and again...

"Hmmm." Mindfang blinks. Rosa was expecting some sort of witty comment about how she's gone downhill or the like. A querying noise is hardly reassuring. "Something's missing."

"...The will to live?" Rosa ventures, more bitterly than she expects.

Mindfang reaches up and grabs her by the chin so hard that Rosa immediately fears she'll have a smattering of bruises. Her gaze is glass-cold and Rosa doesn't want to do anything but run from it. She can't, however, because that glassy gaze is keeping her frozen just as well as a bucket of ice down her back. "I won't have any of that."

Rosa snuffles and pulls herself out of Mindfang's grip. "My apologies, Mistress."

"And no, that's not what's missing--" Mindfang's demeanor flickers back to teasing in the space of a few seconds and Rosa remembers, once again, that she should be very afraid of the woman she sleeps beside every night. "I can't decide what it is."

"The hair, the figure, the clothes, the expression, the tattoos, the piercings--" Rosa lists them off as quickly as she can, hoping that if she says it quickly enough the pain will fail to seep in.

"Boobs. She has them."

"...I was under the impression you didn't see anything wrong with my breasts." Rosa says, misishly, immediately crossing her arms in an attempt to make her breasts appear larger.
"No. No they're lovely." She says lovely in the offhand manner that someone would describe a rather dull flower arrangement that looks pretty enough but isn't enough to remember the next day. "But damn look at that rack on you."

Rosa flushes a little in a mixture of pride and horror. "Thank you."

Mindfang gives her a sidelong glance and coos, softly. "Don't be like that, darling. You know I find you very attractive."

"...They were pierced."

"What?"

"My breasts." Rosa says with a slow shrug, trying to pretend that she's not feeling a secret pride at Mindfang's reaction. "They were pierced."

"WHAT?" Mindfang sounds partially aghast, partially exhilarated. Rosa gives her an innocent smile and Mindfang gapes back.

"You ridiculous woman," Rosa scolds, rolling her eyes and sighing a little. "Look at my ears. Look at my face-- do you not see the marks?"

She points at her little silver scars she knows cover her ears, eyebrows and-- of course-- the quartet of them on her breasts.

"I'd like to get all those between my teeth. Fuck can you imagine that--" She moans in a husky, vibrato fashion that makes Rosa keen a little and then go weak at the knees. Mindfang's still clinging to her, so she goes nowhere. "Mmmm and on your breasts--"

Rosa imagines that too and finds herself immediately thinking about sex-- because-- well she'd have to be rather thick not to imagine that too. There was a reason she got them done. Even if her 16 year old self wasn't fully educated in the nuances of sexuality she knew she liked certain things. "Stop it. You know I don't have them anymore."

"Uggghh Rosa, it's called a fantasy because it isn't real." Mindfang kisses her forehead and then, with a coy smile, slaps her ass. Rosa yelps. "Don't make that face. You know I still like you better."

It does make her feel much better, in fact. She finds herself swallowing the tears she'd felt kindling a fire in her throat and eyes and leaning against Mindfang's side. Her body is welcoming to Rosa's, despite the fact that both of them are fully clothed. She can feel the warmth of her flesh and the small piece of paradise that's the feeling of a loved one's touch on her own body.

Mindfang slings an arm over Rosa's shoulders. It fits there comfortably and her fingers curl around Rosa's delicate shoulder in a matter of seconds. It doesn't take more than a few breaths for Rosa's head to be resting on Mindfang's collarbone and for Mindfang to trill over her like a songbird finding her mate.

"You look very noble." Mindfang murmurs, softly. "Very beautiful, too, my Pet. If I might be so bold as to say so, you look... like you could be the Empress herself."

Rosa huffs and wrinkles her nose back into her face. It's flattery-- she's not stupid enough to believe it. But it's nice to hear all the same. "You just like my non-existent bosom."

"Yes I do." Mindfang acknowledges and Rosa glances upwards to catch the ghost of a smile. "But I also like seeing you alive for once."
"I'm always alive." Rosa says, softly, not wanting to grasp Mindfang's meaning but failing to remain utterly stupid. "Despite my best efforts."

"Just because you have a pulse it doesn't make you alive, Annora." Mindfang huffs, rolling her eyes. "But you're sure as hell alive in this painting. Don't you miss that?"

She falls silent. She doesn't know what to say to that. "I do miss that. Quite a bit, actually."

"Well maybe you should go back to it sometime." Mindfang kisses her temple. "And get your boobs back while you're at it."

"I don't have an ass either." Rosa admits, slowly. "...I'm sad now."

Mindfang laughs, squeezing her shoulders tightly. There's an awkwardness to the gesture that betrays how she feels, however, and Rosa shakes her off. "No, no, Pet, don't be sad! Look at how... hot you used to be?"

"That's not making me feel better." Rosa sniffs dismissively, and crosses her arms over her chest.

"I'm trying, here. What should I say, you were an ugly kid? I think you'd be pissed about that too."

Mindfang rolls her eyes. "Yeesh, the fuck do you want me to do, Rosa?"

"You could have listened to me when I asked you not to go looking for my portrait."

"...You're angry?" Mindfang says, clearly surprised. Her whole face reacts, eyebrows and lips starting north and south from her eyes.

Rosa glares. Mindfang stares. It's not at all amusing, but it should be-- the silent battle being waged between the two of them. "It would mean quite a bit if you'd apologize."

"...You have to be kidding."

"No. No, I'm not going to apologize, I don't apologize for anything."

Rosa seems to remember her doing so at least once or twice. Possibly more. But apparently she doesn't consider it an apology when she makes it herself. "Maybe you should consider changing your stance on that subject."

"...You have to be kidding."

"No. No I am not."

"Rosa--" Mindfang looks trepedatiously horrified at what she may have unleashed. "Rosa, Pet--"

"Vienna." She frowns, eyebrows furrowing down towards her nose. "Don't you care about me?"

She ignores the question. "Stop making that face! I don't like it!"

"I don't like being reminded of how spectacularly horrible my life has been for the past fifty odd years!"

"...I'm sorry. I didn't think about it like that." Mindfang doesn't look chastened, but she wasn't fully expecting that. "I misspoke."

"Thank you. Can we go look at something else now, or do you want to continue giving me an existential crisis?"

"You need an existential crisis, honestly," Mindfang mutters, but she tugs at Rosa's hand and walks
towards the end of the gallery. "C'mon. I'll make it up to you."

Rosa harrumphs, but nuzzles her face into Mindfang's neck all the same-- mostly to avoid the sickening need to see the faces of the girls who replaced her. Mindfang pulls her close again and, after an awkward pause, sighs.

"I didn't mean to upset you. I just... I wish I'd known you then." Mindfang didn't think it through before she said it, but her words are earnest all the same.

"Why?" Rosa queries, feeling more than a little unsettled.

Mindfang shrugs, kissing her cheek. Rosa inhales the scent of her perfume and wishes they were at sea. "I don't know. I feel like we would have been great friends."

"Aren't we great friends?" Rosa teases, laughing brightly but it sounds like a tarnished bell all the same.

"No. I'm madly in love with you and you're ambivantly fond of me."

"Says you." Rosa says quietly, squeezing Mindfang's hand reassuringly. "Let's... let's not do this now. Please? You said you were going to make it up to me."

"...Fuck I did say that, didn't I?" Mindfang groans, throwing her head back and nearly catching her horns on a painting of a rather demented looking teal blood. "This is what happens when pretty girls look sad, I say stupid things--"

"I want to see what you think is going to make up for you reminding me I'm a walking corpse."

Mindfang emits a few haphazard grumbles and tugs Rosa off towards the next gallery. "You're the most spoiled pet in the world, you know that right?"

"I am not wearing a diamond collar so I would beg to differ." Rosa murmurs, grinning. "So you'd better spoil me more."

Mindfang kisses her.

* * *

They walk through a few more galleries of aristocrats until they make their way back to the Ward galleries. Rosa's finally beginning to process Mindfang's initial hesitance to head down that hallways and-- well-- she's rather excited to get her suspicions confirmed.

"I can't believe I'm showing you this," Mindfang grumbles as they stalk down the hallway, heels clicking in tandem. "You had better not harass me with this or I will have my revenge."

Rosa squeezes her elbow. "What in the world am I going to do? Tell Marcus?"

"Yes. He's been dying to see this portrait for years." Mindfang says, heavily. "You must promise me that you won't laugh."

"I will not laugh." Rosa says, solemnly. "At least, probably not."

Mindfang stops walking and frowns, darkly. "Rosa if you laugh about this I won't have sex with you anymore."

Rosa inhales, sharply, without meaning to. Mindfang catches this, of course, and Rosa expects a
sexual comment, but none is forthcoming. "I won't laugh. Promise."

"Okay. I'm trusting you, Rosa." Mindfang says, reluctantly beginning to walk again. She leads Rosa down a hallway covered in portraits, each with a clear theme.

"The Warded portraits are hung from first through eleventh-- which are, of course, ordered by blood color." Mindfang murmurs, softly. "Of course the Sixth Ward is the Sisters so we'll be missing a Ward."

Rosa can't quite recollect her Wards but, as they wander along, things begin to come back to her. All she knows, of course, is the vaguest notions; obviously things don't become at all important until you reach the sixth ward-- the first through fifth are usually ignored as being utterly useless due to their being overseen by lower bloods-- which she thinks is silly, all things considered. Why even give them Wards if you're just going to ignore them?

The answer given to her as a young, impertinent Initiate was that it was Tradition and you Always Follow Tradition.

The first ward is the afterlife, second is infrastructure, third is technology, fourth is oration, fifth is animal husbandry, sixth is-- as Mindfang said-- the Sisters. The seventh is law, the eighth is arts and culture, ninth is war, tenth is religion, eleventh is the navy and-- of course-- the twelfth is the Imperial family.

Mindfang leads her past the first through seventh wards without hesitation, not lingering at a single painting. Rosa follows, less than interested herself in looking at any of them. She knows that if she looks up and sees paintings of the second through fifth wards she'll just ruin a day that's been almost nothing but dreamily romantic.

Well. As much as any day could be dreamy or romantic with Mindfang. She's sweet, darling, horrible and wicked in equal measures. Rosa wraps arms around herself and sighs a little.

"You ready to see my most disgusting secret of all time?" Mindfang mutters, teasingly. Rosa laughs a little and grins, widely. "Oi you said--"

Rosa nuzzles into her and lingers there, awkwardly, desperately trying to catch the scent of sea air on Mindfang's skin. She doesn't find it. "I'm not laughing at whatever you want to show me; I'm laughing at your ever-present histrionics."

"I am not-- I mean-- not always-- I do sleep you know."

Rosa kisses her cheek. "I don't mind," She assures her, softly. "It's really quite endearing."

Mindfang huffs but curls Rosa closer to her all the same. "Don't be mean. If you're mean you won't be allowed to see my portraits. And I'll cry."

"You won't cry. I don't think you're capable of allowing anyone else to hurt you that badly."

"That's a little harsh." Mindfang mutters but she squeezes Rosa’s hand affectionately all the same. "Do you mean it nicely?"

Rosa nuzzles her. Mindfang trills, softly, and rests her head on Rosa's. "Yes I mean it nicely."

"Ok. Good. Close your eyes now, we're almost there and I want it to be a surprise." Mindfang ducks behind her and covers her eyes. Rosa makes an angry noise and Mindfang nudges her neck with one of her elbows. "You're going to peek."
"Am I going to have a nightmare about this?" Rosa mutters, laughing a little. Her heart has already begun to pound; no matter how vehemently she attempts to persuade herself that Mindfang means her no harm, the sudden fear that she's being lead to her death kicks in all the same. "You're scaring me," She mumbles and Mindfang snickers.

"Ten seconds, Rosa." She breathes, her breath alarmingly warm against the back of Rosa's neck in a way that makes her feel as if she's being menaced by a particularly attractive dragon. "We must walk less than two yards and then I'll let you look."

"Fussfangs," Rosa mutters and Mindfang kicks her in the ankle. Accidentally, she's sure. "What am I going to do that's more uncomfortable than you hitting on me?"

"What's wrong with that! I think you used to be really hot!"

"The past tense is what's wrong with that." Rosa grumbles and Mindfang sighs, a sound full of more frustration and anguish than seems appropriate.

"We're not having this discussion. We just had this discussion and we already came to a resolution about it." Mindfang grumbles as she pulls her hands away from Rosa's eyes. "Remember, you said you wouldn't laugh."

"I won't laugh," She intones for what feels like the tenth time. "Why would I laugh-- oh my god you're adorable."

"Fuck me that's even worse than laughing."

Mindfang used to have beautiful hair. Rosa notes this with some surprise, an unabashed smile creeping across her face. She's so darling it's almost enough to make Rosa cry. Look at that face-- look at that beautiful, delicate face, unworn by the pain of the world. There's lines there, to be sure, and her two-dimensional gaze is already quite a bit too old for her age.

"You look so young," Rosa whispers, feeling almost reverent. "Look at you."

Mindfang chuckles. But when Rosa glances at her, she sees a tension in her jaw that she recognizes. It only takes a gentle touch to her wrist to make Mindfang relax. "Damn good rack for a sixteen year old, huh?"

"Sixteen? That's awfully young," Rosa says, absently, still staring at Mindfang's young face. It's such a different scene than her own portrait-- the difference between a loveless government job forced upon you, and the honor of being lucky enough to hatch into nobility.

But despite the fact that little Vienna's a young Marquess and Annora was a Sister, there's something of a kinship. Mindfang's dressed elaborately; heavy jewels hanging around her neck and tugging her earlobes to her shoulders. Her dress is sumptuous, heavy full skirts sewn from the richest of silks and trimmed in what-- even from a distance-- it clearly expensive lace.

To be trite-- Mindfang's wearing the best that money can buy, something vastly different from Rosa's mantle handed down from Sister to Sister and so dilapidated it fell apart after a short few days. But they both stand awkwardly tall and stiff, shunted into roles that weigh far too much for them to carry with grace. Even the skill of the painters can't hide that Annora had spent hours begging to be spared her fate and she doesn't doubt that it took hours of fighting to get Vienna into anything that ruffled.

"You look so sweet," Rosa says, unable to stop herself. Mindfang groans. "Is that your little dog?
And look at all those books, you must have been so happy."

Mindfang makes a disgusted sound. "Little dog? Fuck you Rosa, that 'little' dog was almost as tall as I was and his name was Macbeth and he was the best."

"Awww--" Rosa can imagine that, easily.

"And that was the formal study. I wasn't allowed in there ever again-- until Variane died."

Rosa furrows her eyebrows and frowns. "Variane?"

"The former Marquise. I took over when she made her exit from this plane of existence." Mindfang's phrasing is awkward and Rosa knows, without needing to ask, that the former Marquise 'left this plane' by Mindfang's hands.

Rosa musters an awkward laugh. "Look at you-- you look like that when you're cuddled up and reading; all that's missing are your glasses."

"They wouldn't let me wear them for the portrait," Mindfang grumbles. "And I had to listen."

"I'm not surprised. Sixteen's quite young to be confronted with... This." Rosa makes a vague gesture at the museum. Mindfang doesn't need to ask for any clarification. "Why did they bring you here so early?"

"It's a tradition." Mindfang finally sighs, breaking Rosa's reverie. She weaves their fingers together and squeezes, softly, and Rosa squeezes back without thought. "There was probably a reason, long ago, but fuck knows how long it would take me to find out. All I know is that the Eighth Ward takes her daughters young."

Her voice goes hollow as she speaks and Rosa winces as Mindfang's grip tightens and tightens. She lets out a soft coo of anxiety and her hand goes slack almost immediately.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to--" Mindfang's voice comes out sharp despite the softness of her words.

"Want is perhaps too kindly a word for what I feel. I don't want to-- but-- it's just-- I mean-- Are you ever angry at the entire universe?" Mindfang lets the words out in an unabashed flood, a sudden surge of fury like an undertow stealthily creeping up a sandbar and whisking them both out into an ocean. "Do you ever want to-- to-- reach into the heart of the universe and tear it apart? To rip it at the seams and make every last fiber of the universe cry?"

"Almost constantly." Rosa replies, almost immediately. Mindfang makes an anxious noise but doesn't rebuke her.

"I just-- I-- They-- I woke up one morning and they were there and I barely got to say goodbye to her--" Mindfang's getting increasingly more worked up, her voice rising and falling like furious waves.

"Your Moirail?" Rosa supplies, softly, finding it hard not to replace the word with 'child'.

Mindfang nods, her head bobbing up and down like a bottle cast overboard. She doesn't stop nodding, however, and the frantic motion is more unnerving than the queer timbre of her voice. "Yes. They took me away from her. She didn't want me to go and they just-- they-- they practically ripped me from her arms--"
"Isn't that the worst?" Rosa can't help herself. The thought slips from her lips with a desperate need for someone else to feel the same-- for someone else to agree with her and tell her that she's not crazy.

"It felt like they were ripping away my soul." Mindfang whispers. "I-- I know it can't compare to-- to-- well-- I mean--" She's stumbling over her words in a way that's so foreign from her lips that Rosa almost wants to cry. It's a pathetic attempt at sympathy but she's trying.

"I've never had a Moirail so I cannot judge." Rosa doesn't make her finish her thoughts. Heaven knows Mindfang might break herself in the process.

Mindfang snorts, abruptly. "The fuck is Marcus? Invisible?"

"You'd let him be my Moirail?" Rosa chides, softly. Mindfang shrugs. Embarrassed denials of any pale feelings aren't going to be at all effective in this case since-- well-- they spend every waking moment together. She and Mindfang do, that is. Marcus just appears frequently.

"Why not? He's a nice guy. He likes you. You like him. Fuck knows the two of you'd have a day at the beach ganging up on me all the time." Mindfang rolls her eyes. "And you need it. Seriously."

"That's very generous of you." Rosa gives her a fond smile and reaches out to trail an affectionate hand over her cheek. Mindfang nuzzles into the gesture, still blushing like an idiot.

"You're just saying that because you've seen me looking like an overdressed schoolgirl and you feel bad for me," She mutters.

"You look beautiful." Rosa affirms, without smiling this time. "Truly. Very regal and ineffably elegant."

"Ineffable." Mindfang repeats, rolling her eyes. She looks flattered all the same and Rosa sees her stand a little straighter. "Someone's pulling out all the shots."

"I still like you better covered in blood, mind you." She says as conversationally as she can. "You do make a much better pirate. Decidedly sexier, too. Government officials aren't exactly my type. But I do like them covered in blood."

"No shit." Mindfang snorts, the noise horribly undignified to begin with and only getting more and more ridiculous as she starts to laugh her decidedly ugly laugh, the one that makes her sound like a possessed macaw.

Rosa starts to laugh as well until they're leaning against each other to remain on their feet. Mindfang starts to gasp for air and tries to stutter something and Rosa slaps her on the back until she coughs loudly enough that it interrupts her hysteria.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry that wasn't even-- that wasn't even funny it's just-- fuck me--"

"I must just be that attractive then." Rosa murmurs, her voice still as craggy as a centuries old cliff face as she attempts to calm herself down. "If the idea of my murdering you in your sleep is really that amusing."

"...Was that a death threat? Because since I'm both a government official and a member of the counter-government movement I think my involvement in both is negated."

"Does that work for me too? Mother to a seditious figure and your lover? Or are things not entirely negated because you also uphold the law." The words burn her tongue as she says them with an
awkward spice, mentioning her son's life and death How does that work, anyways?"

"Everyone just pretends not to know I'm the Pirate Mindfang and acts like I'm just a Marquise with the same name." She shrugs and makes a head gesture that sends her earrings swinging.

"We just sort of... bribe and blackmail each other into getting what we want. It helps that I have the most expensive works of art and artifacts in my possession so, ipso facto, I have the best bartering fuel."

Rosa tugs on her arm until she starts off down the hallway. Mindfang seems far too glad to take orders for once, clearly hoping to put as much space between herself and, well, herself as possible.

"I didn't know Alternian aristocracy had a particular affinity for art."

"Oh, fuck no. But they like saying they have expensive things so, y'know... cause and effect." They wander off down the hall until they're in a room full of what appears to be paintings of famous naval battles.

The room has a ceiling that has to be at least as tall as the mainmast of the Widow and has a skylight that's been paned to look like a massive wind rose. The wallpaper is handpainted and utterly exquisite, jewel colored songbirds perched in magnolia trees over a background of the richest blue. It's completely at odds with the paintings that cover the walls, at least a hundred of them-- every single one depicting scenes of utter mayhem.

Ships on fire, ships sinking, sailors screaming as they're abandoned to the cold abyss of the ocean. Each painting has a clear victor: a ship that's flying a single blue flag complete with a fanged skull. The paintings are done in at least a dozen different styles-- if not more-- and Rosa, with her years spent doing nothing but staring at pictures in books and imagining what a real life would be like, can recognize the work of at least a few master hands. It's a beautiful gallery-- truly a testament... to Mindfang's battle skill.

"...Did you have something to do with this?" Rosa asks, cautiously, and Mindfang caws triumphantly, all but skipping into the middle of the room.

"Allllllll of these paintings are my triumphs." She says, throwing her arms into the air and twirling on the heels of her boots. "All of them. I did this all of it."

Rosa slumps down onto one of the benches against the wall to stare around her in abject shock. Mindfang keeps grinning at her and bouncing on the balls of her feet like this is her birthday and she's just been given the one thing she's always wanted. (Note to self, find out what that is.)

"Did you... Did you commission paintings of all of your naval battles?" She whispers, covering her mouth to hide her incredulous grin. "Because this is the most ridiculous waste of money I've ever seen."

"No, shut up, you love it-- I can hear you smiling!" Mindfang growls from across the room. "Don't make fun of me!"

"I'm not! It's just-- you-- you paid to have all these painted?"

"Technically the government did. In order to commemorate the loss of life suffered by the Royal Navy while battling the infamous Pirate Mindfang."

"You mean the Marquise Mindfang acting as a pirate." Rosa corrects her, officially giving up on pretending that she's not witnessing the most glorious display of narcissism in the history of the world
and failing to do anything but fall in love with her for it.

"No, Pet, I mean the Pirate Mindfang. Pirate Mindfang and Marquise Mindfang are in no way the same person."

Rosa gives her a smile. She's earned it, after all. Mindfang grins back and lopes over like she's a hungry wolf separated from her pack for months who just found her first prey of the winter.

"Oh my. Two Mindfang’s?" Rosa teases, softly, ignoring the blush suffusing her face. "So which one of them is in love with me?"

"Vienna's in love with you." Mindfang says, authoritatively. Without any pretense of pretending that she's going to allow Rosa to have personal space ever again, she settles into her lap and starts to kiss her, gleefully.

It's a little odd not to be the one in Mindfang's lap, but it certainly causes far less neck strain. When she's the one in her lap kissing involves so much contortion of her neck that she can't ever properly enjoy it. This way around Mindfang's the one doing all the work. It's a nice change to just sit there and enjoy the slight chill of her fingertips against her jaw and feel the pleasant buzz of their lips sealed together like an envelope.

She luxuriates in the sensation of Mindfang's weight against her and the ability to reach up and cling to her shoulders and hold her where she is. Mindfang can't stop smiling and the full press of her fangs against Rosa's lips is unsettling but she loves it all the same. Her feet swing back and forth as she continues to lavish Rosa with all the affection she can muster, the heels of her boots brushing against her ankles and giving her two second bursts of reality between the giddy high of romance.

"If you'd let me I would fuck you right here." Mindfang whispers, huskily, when she finally pulls away, lipstick still miraculously on her lips instead of all over Rosa's face. "You are such a wonderful creature."

Rosa rolls her eyes, pretending that she's not utterly scandalized by the thought of having sex in a public place do people even do that!? "That seems like it would violate the sanctity of this hallowed chamber."

"I think my ego is in love with you." Mindfang mumbles, deliriously. It's more than a little ridiculous but it's so endearingly Mindfang.

"What about the rest of you?" Rosa prompts, raising her eyebrows. Mindfang huffs a little but hops out of her lap in an elegant, feline gesture.

"She wants to show you the rest of the collection."

* * *

Mindfang doesn't take nearly as much time with the rest of the tour once they realize how late it has become. By the time they're exiting the museum it's already four and-- after a rather extended lunch at an unbelievably sunny cafe tucked away in an alley-- they don't return to the hotel until almost six thirty. Rosa can tell, however, that the only reason they stopped was that Mindfang is attempting to look out for her; if she'd been on her own, there's a good chance she would have just found a comfy bench to camp out on and spend the night among her treasures.

They wander through the courtyard hand in hand, as they've been for most of the day. Rosa can't tell if it's meant to be blithely affectionate or subtly dominating. Either way she's not going to tell her to shop.
"I'm going to see if there's any messages for me at the desk," Mindfang murmurs as they step into the lobby. "I'm sure someone wants my attention. Go on up."

She presses the key, a gorgeous piece of brass work carefully engraved with their room number '88', into her palm. Rosa hesitates.

"I'll be right there," Mindfang says, not sounding annoyed, exactly but-- well-- not too far off from mildly aggravated.

Rosa nods a little and shuffles off towards the elevator, more slowly that she needs to. She doesn't want to be left alone. She knows what's going to happen once she's left alone and it frightens her because the last thing she wants to do is confront all the anger she has with herself and with the culture that made her this way. It needs to be done, yes, but she doesn't want to do it now.

But the moment the elevator doors close before her, she feels the coldness seeping into her bones. She takes a deep breath and tries to focus on something that makes her feel better.

She comes up with nothing but forces herself to ignore it. She tells the elevator operator her floor number in a soft voice and he salutes her, kindly. The elevator rumbles upwards and pings on the fifth floor.

Rosa steps out and shambles along until she finds their room. The key fits into the lock and turns, easily, the door swinging open without so much as a creak. She settles down onto the couch before their fireplace and fidgets with the hem of her dress.

Oh dear. Oh dear she's going to have a breakdown tonight, isn't she? Do something stupid? Light someone on fire? She needs Mindfang here, now. Next to her. Telling her stupid stories about something she doesn't care about.

It takes Mindfang fifteen minutes to make it upstairs. When she gets through the door she looks more harried than Rosa's seen since they left the ship.

"Fuck all someone's made a meeting with me," She mutters, darkly, throwing open the armoire and kicking off her shoes. "I hate it when that happens. You tell someone you've got an open schedule and they make you commit to something."

"Are we going to dinner?" Rosa asks, hopefully, sitting up straighter and brightening up. That's just what she needs. A nice dinner, some wine, a good dessert--

Mindfang glances over her shoulder and gives Rosa a look that's just a little too guilty. "Not we, Pet," She says, slowly. "I-- I don't think you want to come."

"Really?" Rosa's voice goes up an octave. "Why not?"

"It's... It's a political contact, Rosa, not a... um... social one. He might try to have you arrested. So you're staying here."

"Staying... staying here?" She doesn't want to stay here. Things aren't going to end well if she stays here. "Do I have to?"

"Yes." Mindfang growls, narrowing her eyes. "Rosa, I'll be gone for all of three hours, don't tell me you can't handle yourself that long? Seven to ten, that's all. And then we can have sex for the rest of the night."

"...Can't you make it seven to eight?"
"No." She says, firmly. "No, I make the rules and I'm telling you I'll be gone for three hours."

Mindfang's already struggling out of her day clothes. Rosa shuffles over to her against her will, resisting her need to sulk. She helps her out of her clothes and then into an evening dress.

She's all but completely ignored while Mindfang goes through her papers and does up her hair, reapplying her makeup with one hand while the other hand flips through legal documents.

"I'm going to leave you some money; get dinner downstairs-- better yet, have it sent up and don't leave the room at all," Mindfang says, breezily, as she stalks towards the door. "Don't even think about leaving the building, darling, I've told the bellhops that you're unable to go out in public due to a medical condition and if left unattended you might drown."

"That's mean. And a lie."

"Oh shut up you're suicidal and unable to swim, don't tell me that it's not a viable point." Mindfang kisses her forehead and leaves a lipstick mark. "If you're not here when I get back, I will have my revenge."

* * *

True to her word, Mindfang has told the bellboys that she can't leave the hotel. When she wanders downstairs an hour later to get dinner, she's stopped by three of them who kindly offer to escort her back to her room and she has to explain, each time, she just wants food.

She's seated outside on the same terrace they had breakfast in, at a table all on her own. A glass of wine is poured for her with expert precision by a tuxedoed waiter and her food is delivered with remarkable timing. Rosa eats, slowly, forcing her brain to pay attention to the food instead of tearing the remaining shreds of her sanity to pieces.

"Hello Miss!"

A voice comes from behind her shoulder and she turns, surprised. It's the same attendant from a few days before; the nice young man who had flirted with her. He's flawlessly dressed in a waiter's uniform now, and her face softens a little because he looks rather well-put together in a way that reminds her of her boy.

"Good evening, dear," She murmurs, smiling genuinely for the first time since Mindfang's departure. "You look very professional."

"Why thank you! I'd say it's personal choice, but it's really a concern about losing my job." He winks and she laughs. "I trust you spent the day enjoying our fair city?"

"Very much!" She chirps, hating how high her voice goes. "I think I've seen every art museum you have to offer at this point-- we spent the day at the portrait gallery and I have to commend the collection."

"Only the art galleries? Ohh, Miss, you're not getting half of what we have to offer. You haven't seen any of the shrines, yet?"

Rosa frowns. Oh dear. She'd forgotten about the shrines. Religion in Alternia has never been much of an issue-- for her least of all. But she supposes visiting the shrines is something expected of her. "No, I have yet to have that pleasure."

"Well, if you only see one of 'em, the Sister's shrine is really something." He shrugs a little. "Pretty
unique. Looks like they just blew a hole in the ground and threw a statue down in it."

Rosa smirks into her wineglass. Oh dear heavens she's going to laugh. "Seems accurate."

"They say it's haunted, too," He whispers, conspiratorially. "By the ghost of the Dolorosa. But mum's the word on that."

She almost chokes on her mouthful of wine. That's... well... inaccurate would be one way to say it. Doesn't one have to be fully deceased in order to haunt a place they don't reside in? But the idea still sparks a painful curiosity, like a match tossed into a bottle of vodka. There's a Shrine to the Sisters? She hadn't remembered that.

"I'll have to visit. Is it nearby?"

"Oh, of course. Only about twenty minutes-- I'm sure the concierge can draw you a map."

A few moments later he's called away to wait on a table and Rosa stares after him. She's haunting a shrine to the place she hates the most. That seems... unreasonable. It's worth investigating.

She pays the bill-- a process that's made a little more awkward by the realization that Mindfang has left her over two-thousand dollars to get herself dinner. She curses her Mistress black and blue in her brain as she stomps back inside, once again reminding a few busboys that she's coming back from dinner and knows where she lives.

The concierge does know where the shrine is and sketches her a map on the back of a brochure. She thanks him and slips it into her pocket.

Sometimes questioning her life takes the form of inflicting pain on herself as a means of atonement. Other times it takes the form of unneeded bloodshed. Yet other times she adopts strange girls out of the desert and tries not to feel awkward when her son proceeds to fall in love with her.

This time, however, it's taking the form of needing to know whether or not she's allowed to burn down a shrine that is, ostensibly, dedicated to her. And everyone else in her Order, but that's beside the point.

She knows she can't go out in her dress; she'll look ridiculous. She doesn't want to get noticed or even attract attention. All she wants to do is--

Well. She's not sure what it is she'd like to do, yet. But she's sure it will be in her best interests to be inconspicuous. With the focused attitude of a woman used to mending her Mistress's things when she's not looking (because honestly how does she not notice when she rips her clothes) Rosa eases open the doors of the armoire. One of the maids has hung their things sometime during the past day which is-- really-- a rather nice change from digging through old, salt-worn trunks.

Her clothes are interspersed between Mindfang's, the heavy laden satin hangers pressing up against one another in a manner that's oddly intimate. It makes Rosa's heart turn in on itself like an octopus attempting to curl up inside a conch shell.

She likes the fact that their clothes are mixed up together. It's somehow significant but she doesn't quite know how. Either way, it makes it easier for her to find a few things that seem appropriate for skulking about the city at night.

As it would turn out, Mindfang owns leather pants. Black leather pants, in fact. And they fit her, after a little bit of hopping around awkwardly to jam her foot down one of the leg holes. Rosa would normally scoff at that, of course, but-- well-- she wants to look inconspicuous, not 'oh look how
harmless I am' but more 'don't pay me any attention or I'll stab you'. And leather pants will, presumably, convey this fact successfully.

She pulls on one of Mindfang's long sleeved shirts, one that's a little tighter. It only gives her a few moments pause to realize that most of Mindfang's clothing is really more appropriate for a cat burglar to own than a pirate. What exactly is she planning to do, anyways? Rob an art museum?

That seems a little silly. She owns everything in there, after all. Perhaps she's going to rob a library? Rosa would like to go along on that job.

The next step is to stuff her feet into a pair of boots that will keep her feet warm and dry. The only remaining problem is, of course, how to hide her face. Even just a little. But, of course, Mindfang's wardrobe has a solution for that as well; at the rightmost edge of the armoire she discovers a cloak.

Mindfang is most definitely a member of a local thieves guild. Possibly one that enjoys blackmailing local merchants into giving her books for free or something of the sort.

Rosa pulls it on and it settles around her elegantly. It's warm and exquisitely soft, woven from a beautiful cashmere dyed the color of the darkest night sky. She secures it at her left collarbone with the gold brooch already pinned there, a large distorted 'm' shape that she knows as Mindfang's symbol.

She edges the hood up her head and clumsily unfastens the gold findings that secure the hood around her horns. Rosa finds herself utterly incapable of redoing them without the help of a mirror, of course, and ends up awkwardly shuffling over to the mirror to watch her own hands work. Her fingers tremble, poorly manicured claws catching on the fabric.

It reminds her of her son and the ridiculous gray swath of linen he wore around his shoulders and the thousands of times she sewed and resewed that silly hood.

But this is different. Very different. Mindfang's cloak is clearly made for luxury, to keep her warm while she's... um... doing something? Travelling? Going to the fruit market? Reading books on a park bench? None of those things seem very nautical or quite so devious as she knows her Mistress to be.

Either way, when she pulls the crown of the hood down low over her eyes and puts on her most forbidding expression... she wouldn't want to encounter herself in a darkened alley on the way to do her shopping.

It's all beginning to come back to her-- the covert behavior, the antisocial eyes, the need to be seen but forgotten. She knows how to do this.

And she's going to do it. Just once more.

* * *

Rosa steals out along the staircase and then skulks along the edge of the lobby, not trusting the concierge not to be under orders to keep her inside.

She knows which fountain he was talking about and, after only a few uncertain blocks, finds it. She walks around it, slowly, enjoying the view and the sound of the water. It's peopled with couples clearly happy to be together and Rosa's heart twinges.

All things considered, she would much rather be sitting on the edge of a fountain, Mindfang beside her lecturing on the history of the fountain's sculpture and-- well-- probably eight thousand other
things.

It's cute. So cute, in fact, that she resolves to ask Mindfang to bring her back here tomorrow morning. Provided she goes back.

Rosa stops. Oh dear. Is she thinking of doing that? Apparently she is. This is going to require a little thinking, isn't it. She's not exactly in the mood for this. She's already questioning her very existence, isn't she?

Perhaps she's going to end up going back underground after all. But even as the thought condenses into a sentence she begins to feel sick, like heaps of earth have been poured onto her. No. She's not going to do that.

Her steps are heavy as she walks down the streets towards the shrine. But wouldn't that be for the best, at the end of the day? She can't tell. Would Mindfang miss her? She wants to think so.

It only takes ten minutes of anxious walking in the dark for her to find her destination. It's hard to miss the shrine to the Sisters-- for one thing, it's the only building on the whole street that has doors carved from jade instead of wood or marble. It's far more ostentatious than anything Rosa's ever seen and utterly at odds with the sparse lifestyle she remembers living underground.

She takes the steps into the building as quickly as she can. Which is quite slowly. Rosa needs to see this place with a fervor that's burning a hole in her chest but going inside feels like willingly sitting down to brunch with her worst nightmare.

But she closes her eyes and bears it, diving across the threshold in a wave of black wool. When she opens her eyes, it's as if the past thirty five years never happened. She could be miles beneath Alternia's surface; the stone that surrounds her is harsh and craggy, candles set into every crevice that will hold them.

There isn't any electricity in the building-- that much is obvious. Nothing but candlelight and, of course, the flame. The entire room, built to look like an enormous cave, is dominated by a tremendous statue. It's the only thing in the room that looks expensive-- mostly because thirty foot statues carved from marble always have that effect. She's been set into a pit that gets progressively wider the deeper it goes, the effect of which is that she and the statue can meet one another's eyes and the warmth of the fire wafts upward on an unknown breeze.

It's the first Sister, the first woman who retreated underground to tend to the young. She has an ancient looking brazier dangling from one of her outstretched hands and, within its bowl, a fire burns brightly.

Out of habit, Rosa reaches up and slips her hood off her head. The mechanism keeping the hood secure around her horns comes undone with relative ease when she tugs at its brim.

She doesn't look like any statue Rosa's ever seen. Usually paintings and statues of the Sisters have the same benevolent stare, a faint smile and an expression that conveys kindly disdain. Even her own portrait had a rather... condescending look to it.

This woman, however, looks haunted and utterly enraged. There's not even a sense of resignation just-- unapologetic anger at the fact that she's been memorialized. Rosa likes her. Perhaps if she'd still been alive she wouldn't feel so horribly broken by her destiny.

Rosa stares up at her. The Daughter of Beforus who mothered all of Alternia. Poor girl. She must have had an awfully heavy heart. At least I got out, Rosa consoles herself.
The sight of the Shrine is brushing the carefully spun cerulean cobwebs off of the worst memories catalogued deep within the annals of her thoughts. Everything is tinted in an unholy rainbow of color, the taste of death on her tongue and the endless blackness of unlit caves and carefully repressed memories.

If she picks at the threads that have sewn black velvet over the gristly tie-dyed patchwork of memories and can remember screaming for mercy for everyone to hear but no one to care. She remembers begging that they set her free and, above all, she remembers how much it had hurt to be alive. And that it was even worse to come back to life after so long, enjoy herself and then-- well-- suffer.

She doesn't know what comfort she was hoping to find from being here. A benediction from a retired Sister tending the flames? An encounter with another long-lost compatriot? Some sort of validation that yes, the decades she spent slaughtering children was really for the greater good?

A statue of a woman dead for thousands of years is hardly going to give her any of that. But Rosa reaches towards her and sighs all the same. She looks as if she needs a hug poor dear, and she can't help but admire the artist, whoever it may have been.

Poor woman. What must she have given up. How could anyone willingly descend into the face of hell with nothing but the light of a tiny fire to give them company? She'll never know the answer to that. Mostly because she fought, biting and yowling, to keep from the same fate.

Glory be damned. Honor be fucked. She doesn't care about either of those things-- hasn't since she was eighteen. The thought of being remembered for nothing more than being a well-behaved nun who never made a peep and never caused a stir made her sick. Being remembered as the self-sacrificing woman who was so kind, so wholesome, so wonderful to take in the Signless wasn't any better.

And now what is she?

She doesn't even know. Mindfang herself probably doesn't know. It's been so long since she's been free from an obligation that's unshakably soldered to her being that-- well-- the uncertainty threatens to drive her mad.

"You poor woman." Rosa whispers, giving her a pitying smile. How she must have suffered. She herself has never forgotten the heartbreaking relief she felt when she first held her son in her arms and he was one of billions of grubs. How she must have cried the first time she'd seen another living being.

It hits her like a basin full of saltwater after a hike through a bramble patch just how lucky she is to have escaped her fate. Oh heavens is she lucky. A sudden, agonizing relief fills her and she feels the urge to be violently ill out of the sudden knowledge that she's so lucky, so blessed to have gotten free and found her own corner of the universe.

She'd fought so hard for that freedom. Lost so many times that she can't even bring herself to dwell on it. And now, she has it all. An ocean, a pirate ship, a pirate, the means to take over the world--

And what is she doing? Sulking. Sulking like it will make things better, like it will make her pain bearable. Well, it's not going to make things better. She wants to mourn her gorgeous little boy as long as she can, she won't deny that. There isn't anything in the world that would give her such comfort than to descend into herself and sob until someone puts her out of her misery.

But that's not helping anyone. It certainly won't help her dead child; he's long gone to the elements.
And it's clearly not helping her at all. Instead of spending her evenings flirting with Mindfang and trying to coax her into allowing her hair to be braided, she's been sitting in an armchair crying into innumerable glasses of wine.

Her life isn't any better for her crying. Perhaps if she had someone to share it with, it would be. But as much as Mindfang cares for her, she can't understand this. No one can. So maybe-- maybe it's about time she raised her head high in her mourning instead of collapsing beneath the weight of so many unshed tears. Because what's more impressive than a woman who's lived through so much horror?

That's right. Nothing. Rosa stares at her marble sister and gives her a small smile. She might not be the woman Annora thought she'd grow up to be but, perhaps, she'll live with that. Perhaps she can--Light something on fire and fuck shit up. Because, after all, she mothered a rebel. There must be some sort of internalized rage waiting to be blown up. Correction-- there is a lot of internalized rage waiting to be blown up.

She hated herself all those years because she couldn't do anything. No choice, really. It's hard to overthrow a group of rather... um... zealous nuns and it's equally as hard to have a social life when you have a trio of mischievous zealots to wrangle.

Yes. She's alive now. Alive with the resources to enjoy herself. And she intends to enjoy herself. Hopefully there's going to be quite a bit of sex and even more wine. And some cheese. She could really go for a romantic evening full of wine, cheese and Mindfang attached to her neck.

Perhaps it's about time she did that, Rosa muses, staring hard into the angry eyes of the founding Daughter of the Order of Penumbra. Because it's about fucking time she did something with her life that she wants to do.

Rosa salutes the statue with the respect instilled in her from the day she was hatched. As she stands, enjoying a moment of solitude with her Great Predecessor, she hears a faint noise from the bottom of the pit. Rosa glances down, frowning, and beneath she can pick out the faint light of a torch.

That's odd. She hadn't seen anyone when she'd come in. Rosa decides, in the spirit of embracing life for the sake of living, she might as well investigate. After all, she had sex with a pirate queen last night. She might as well let some of that notorious Mindfang bravado rub off on her.

She starts off down the stairs that edge the pit, moving with the silence of the night that she was forced to absorb. Rosa walks slowly, one arm braced against the cool stone of the wall while the other remains useless at her side. Unless, of course, something flies into her face and attacks her. Then it's primed to fight.

Walking the walls isn't at all difficult after the months she's spent on the Widow and her sea-legs come back to her. Two, four, eight, sixteen, twenty four-- she counts the steps by twos until she begins to make out the statue's knees in the darkness.

There isn't much light down here at all, only a few sputtering candles here and there. She grabs one and holds it out before her in an attempt to keep from falling. It's obvious that it isn't an area frequented and the old, familiar societal guilt kicks in. Until, of course, she remembers that she's a Sister and has every right to do as she damn well pleases in her own shrine.

She takes the last few stairs more quickly than the previous two hundred and ninety four, her cloak brushing against the wall with a soft swish of expensive fabric.
The space this far below feels utterly sacred, full of silence and the heady smell of flowers. She can't see light anywhere and frowns—she *had* seen someone down here, she’s sure of it.

But instead of another person--a Banished Sister who'd reached her time and been sent above ground? Perhaps someone she'd actually been fond of, instead of Davina. But there's no one and nothing.

She holds her candle out before her and steps off the staircase, taking small, delicate steps towards the base of the statue. The Daughter is standing on a marble plinth that goes up to Rosa's shoulders and carved into the base is what appears to be an inscription. It's been written in a form of Alternian so old Rosa can barely decipher it. She can pick out only one phrase which is 'Our Eternal Thanks'.

That's nice. She raises an eyebrow and moves closer. Something crunches beneath her feet with a soft noise--like sugar cubes dissolving into hot tea, if that *had* a noise. A sudden, nauseating panic fills her body as she becomes utterly sure that she's just crushed the carapace of a sacrificial grub beneath her feet.

Oh no, no, no, no, no--She kneels down, murmuring frantic apologies, praying that she's not about to encounter a tiny pair of horns. And, for a fraction of a second, she's terrified that she has because she finds a sharp point in the debris. But instead of a pair of horns unfortunately separated from a tiny, lifeless body, she lifts up the stem of a long-dead rose.

And then another. And another and--surprisingly--another. She gets to her feet and crouches down, diffusing the hazy candlelight in front of her. The entire floor of the pit is covered in roses in varying states of vibrancy and decay. The feet of the statue are covered in red roses that still have dew clinging to their suede-textured petals.

It's clear that the roses have been deposited here for at least a few months if not a year, but the piles of dead flowers can't be much older than that. She walks around the statue, stunned.

It's such an affectionate gesture for a woman so long gone that her eyes immediately well up with tears. She raises her candle higher and higher as she spirals her way back towards the stairs. Roses are stuffed into every crevice in the rock and it's so *beautiful*.

What ruins it, of course, is when she catches sight of writing on the wall. Not metaphorical wall writing, but actual chalk marks scrawled across the rock. She steps back to take it all in and--

Well *fuck*. Her good mood vanishes. Her symbol, long stripped from her, is scrawled across the wall. A hastily scribbled inscription beneath it reads "in grateful memory".

Great. Fantastic, even. She has a shrine within a shrine to an Order she hates more than anything in the world. She has a shrine full of red roses and--well--she only has it because of her *dead child*.

Oh for the love of *fuck*.

She doesn't want to be remembered for this! She doesn't want to be remembered for *any of this*, not for being a Sister, not for being a Mother, not for being a martyr--

Rosa wishes she had a piece of chalk right about now, because the obscenities she feels like scribbling across the wall are *begging* to be released. She reaches out and frantically rubs at the chalk on the wall--it doesn't go anywhere.

If she was waiting for a sign that her life has been a complete and utter sham, this is it. She kicks the wall, hard, and lets out an angry jade screech. She stomps up the stairs at record speed, cloak flaring out behind her.
For the love of all things on the face of the planet--

She's going to murder someone. Probably. And if she doesn't murder someone, she's going to get a stiff drink and if she doesn't get that she'd better get some good sex. Of course, none of those things are very viable at the moment since she doesn't know of a reputable bar, she doesn't have anyone to kill and Mindfang is otherwise occupied.

This is, she thinks, the absolute worst way to end one's day. Faced with a reminder of what your mortality has brought you-- pain, suffering, horror, cannibalism--

No. No, not thinking about the cannibalism. Rosa rushes out into the night air, allowing the warm, balmy weather to wash over her like a good cup of tea. It doesn't bring with it the same amount of comfort, of course, but it's something.

Rosa starts walking without any idea where she's going-- she goes straight, then left, then right, then right again then backwards, then in a circle--

Just for once she'd like to feel like she did when she was young and able to tolerate the world around her. How did she do it back then? How did an eighteen year old girl make it through the horror of it all? The death, the pain, the rest of the pain, the loneliness, the knowledge of what was to come--

She made it through because she didn't care about making other people happy. Well. She did care about that, but she cared about that after she made herself feel better about... herself.

Oh dear. She has drunk brain already. Having drunk brain before she's had any alcohol is never a good sign. Once this sets in its only moments until she starts standing in one place, sobbing and staring into blank space.

So instead she keeps walking, utterly unaware of where she's going on what she's doing.

* * *

Eventually, she ends up in a part of the city that seems utterly out of place. Instead of the beautiful clay-colored walls of the antique city or the worn out cobblestones there's poured concrete and carefully cemented bricks. There's electric lights here, shining yellow circles out through thick, rippled glass, and Rosa can hear signs of life almost everywhere.

There's people sitting outside at restaurants, despite the hour, old couples who look far above the common era and young couples that seem far too juvenile to be embarking upon the trial of a relationship.

She pulls her cloak around her a little tighter, warm and cozy within a nest of cashmere. It feels so lonely to be out on her own. The insatiable craving to do something exciting and despicable is stronger than it's ever been.

Logically, she knows she should find her way back to the hotel, wrap herself up in a throw blanket and order room service-- perhaps knit Mindfang a sweater. But she doesn't know where she is, nor does the ravenous animal set loose in her chest have and wish to become domesticated.

Instead she finds a tea shop that's open and slips inside. She gets herself a cup of tea and sits down at a table at the very back of the shop.

Rosa nurses her tea quietly. She settles the cup back into the saucer with the delicate clink of good china and lets out a sigh. Usually this anxious urge can be quelled by sawing someone in half. But tonight that doesn't seem quite enough. She wants to re-introduce herself to herself, to recollect what it is she liked to do before all this happened.
She reaches up and tugs at the newly reinstated piercings in her ear, fidgeting with each of the silver loops with the frantic need of a habit long forgotten. When she realizes what she's doing, she drops her hands to the table with hasty embarrassment because-- well-- that's hardly acceptable behavior for a woman her age. Rosa stares down at the table where her wrists still show the signs of months spent in shackles, not to mention the scars from her 'visit' to Dualscar's ship.

Her skin has been broken and etched into by so many hands beside her own that looking at it makes her feel like all she has left is her own mind. And she doesn't even have that now, considering who she's taken as her lover. Maybe that's what this is. Ownership. She wants to own herself again.

Yes. It would be nice to look in a mirror and, instead of thinking 'Mindfang will think I look pretty', she wants to think 'I like the way I look'.

Rosa flexes her fingers one by one. Yes, that would be nice. She's surprised at the sudden craving she has to feel that. It doesn't take much longer for her brain to complete the decision making process. She finishes off her tea and sets off on a quest.

She has to ask a few passersby before she finds anyone who can point her in the correct direction. Most of the trolls regard her with slightly perturbed shock, glancing over her as if to say 'why in the world do you want that?' But, as always, determination wins out.

Eventually she's pointed down a long road that looks just a little less trafficked than the rest and she thanks the helpful citizen with a soft, shy smile. When she finally finds her destination, she finds herself grinning anxiously, a surge of adrenaline coursing through her chest.

Rosa knows a piercing parlor when she sees one. As an adolescent runaway with more money than inhibitions, she'd spent her share of time in the hives of trolls just a little older than her who had created impromptu shops in their living rooms while lusii fretted nearby. Those places were hardly professional and hardly the most appropriate place to get needles shoved through delicate flesh, but she'd done it then.

The store is relatively unassuming which is what she likes, but the window is clean and the light doesn't flicker. There isn't any rust on the railings and, aside from the sign that advertises they'll pierce anywhere, it looks perfectly reputable.

That and-- of course-- the impressively pierced and tattooed individuals loitering outside. She gives them all a small, insincere smile and they greet her with quiet 'good evenings'.

Rosa steps inside, summoning up the last vestiges of her younger self to mold a careful facade. The store smells like rubbing alcohol and innocence and she inhales it carefully. Yes. She's going to do this.

And it is going to be completely awesome and she won't regret it at all. Although, attempting to convince Mindfang she did it herself in a hotel bathroom with a sewing kit might be next to impossible. Rosa glances at the pocket watch sewn into Mindfang's cloak and decides that fuck all she's a fully grown woman perfectly capable of going out for a leisurely night stroll.

...Oh dear it's been four hours since she left. Hmm. That's not particularly useful. Should she run back and hope Mindfang won't notice she's gone? The answer is no because, at this point, she doesn't quite care.

"Are they still open?" She asks one of the young men hovering around. He gives her a nod. "Walk-ins?" He nods again. "Thank you, dear. That's a lovely set of tragus piercings you have there."
She shoves open the door. Bells above it jangle a little too cheerfully. But perhaps cheer wouldn't be too amiss at this particular moment.

There's a woman standing behind the shop's counter who doesn't do a particularly stellar job of concealing her incredulity at the sight of a woman of Rosa's age entering her shop at midnight. But she's professional and gives Rosa a friendly enough greeting.

"Can I help you with anything, ma'am?"

"Yes, actually," Rosa murmurs, stepping up to the counter and tapping her fingers, anxiously, on the glass above a case of piercings. "I'd like to get some work done, if you have someone available."

She nods. Her hair falls down to her chin in sharp, jagged layers and she's run it through with the full spectrum of colors at the tips. Rosa takes a liking to her immediately. "I can take you myself, depending on what you want done--"

Rosa pulls her hair aside to show off her half-pierced ear. "I used to have earrings going up around the point-- I'd like to get the piercings redone."

"That's not too hard. Shouldn't take more than a few minutes--"

"I'd also like to get my breasts done."

"Oh." She blinks and takes in a bit of a breath. Rosa can't tell if it's because she doesn't know how she feels about doing breast piercings on older, less attractive women or if it's because she doesn't think Rosa should be doing it. "Oh. Oh I see. Are you-- are you sure?"

No. Of course she isn't sure. She's having a midlife crises and attempting to prove a point to the woman who owns her. "I'm quite sure, yes."

"It's generally our policy to be careful about who gets more... sensitive piercings done," She says, slowly, her pen tapping on her receipt pad and leaving small slashes of blue on the yellow paper. "It's nothing personal-- just-- um-- some of the higher bloods can get a bit... aggressive."

Well. That's not what she was expecting to hear. It's a pleasant surprise, though, and Rosa gives her a wry grin, raising her eyebrows. "I commend your diligence, my dear. I've had them done before."

She relaxes a little. "Of course, but--"

"I'm only green." She murmurs, placing a hand over the brooch that bears Mindfang's symbol. "I'm quite stable. And I won't object if you feel the need to restrain me."

"Well, I don't see why we should have any problems, then. Unless-- of course-- there was any medical reason you removed your piercings in the past?"

"My... career didn't exactly allow for much in the way of body modification." Rosa picks her words as calmly as she can. "And it's been quite some time from my adolescence to my... retirement."

"No allergic reactions? No rejections?"

Very professional. Rosa appreciates that. "No; I've never had an issue. Although I do have a preference to silver or gold above base metals."

"Of course." She's writing in a bizarre shorthand that Rosa's fascinated by. It reminds her of Mindfang's frantic scribbling in her journals. It's so youthful and energetic. It makes her smile to see
the same exuberance in a much younger woman. "Well. If you're ready, I can get your ears done now? I'll need to wait until one of the artists gets here to... um... perform the procedure on your breasts."

"Sounds lovely." Rosa says, peering at the paperwork shoved before her, waiting for approval. "Do I sign here? What am I agreeing to?"

She grins at Rosa, handing her a pen. "Not to sue me if I have to hit you with a frying pan."

"Oh certainly. I hate lawyers." She signs her name with an obnoxious flourish. "They have a tendency to destroy everything I love."

She laughs. Rosa doesn't.

* * *

Her ears pierce easily and with barely noticeable pain. Soon enough her right ear once again is graced with twenty one holes and just as many little gold studs. Her left only gets eight-- one at her lobe and six just beneath the point of her ear.

Only a few drops of blood are shed and they land on the shoulder of her shirt so quickly that the color goes unnoticed.

"You have lovely ears," She says with a shy smile. "Such gorgeous points on your cartilage. They fit your face quite nicely, too."

"Thank you." Rosa reaches up, self-consciously, to run her fingers over the still aching studs. "My... my matesprit can move hers with remarkable dexterity so I'm afraid I'd much rather have that ability over symmetry."

"That sounds delightful." She bustles about the room, putting her tools away to be sterilized and washing her hands. "Mine are too short to be of much expressive use, I'm afraid."

"She looks like an angry kitten the way they flit around." She laughs a little, trying to restrain the sound and failing.

"You seem very fond of her."

Rosa fidgets with the cloak, draped over her lap like an incredibly expensive blanket. She presses the tips of her fingers into the points of the 'M' and is surprised to find herself blushing. "I most certainly am."

"She's lucky to have you. You're a beautiful woman."

"And you haven't even seen me with my top off yet." Oh dear. Is she going to be cheating on Mindfang tonight? She hopes not. That would be a rather unfortunate way to add insult to injury.

Her new friend blushes a little. Rosa pretends not to notice that, or feel guilty at the unintentional flirtation. "Um-- do you need me to wait outside while you... disrobe?"

Rosa gives her a curious stare. "You are the artist who's going to... do my breasts, aren't you?"

"Yes-- but-- for the sake of your comfort--"

"Sweetheart, you're going to force hypodermic needles through my nipples in a few moments." Rosa places a comforting hand on her shoulder. She's not nearly as bony as Mindfang and it throws her for
a loop and she yanks her touch away. "It's okay."

And it is okay. She pulls her shirt off and unhooks her bra and, as she waits in the chair, her piercing artist ducks outside and retrieves one of the other employees to ensure that Rosa won't eat her alive in a fit of pique.

The procedure is far less painful than she remembers it. She's still yowling, of course, but-- well-- having a professional hand, instead of an amateur in his kitchen makes things a little easier. She watches with detached fascination as her new 'friend' pulls out a slim handclamp and applies it to the soft flesh of her nipple, compressing it. Rosa winces at that, of course, digging her fingernails into the arm of the chair. It's not from the pain so much as the fact that she knows what reaction she's supposed to have and open arousal isn't going to make this more comfortable for anyone.

When the needle goes through, however, the pain she feels is genuine. She hisses, sharply, and her fangs sink into her lower lip. A keen fights out of her throat and she squeezes her eyes shut.

"You're fine, you're fine," Her piercer murmurs, warmly. "We just need to get your ring in--"

And then it's done. She's bleeding, her breast is an angry shade of green and she wants to bite the girl's hand off, but it's done. She makes it through the other side with even less of a reaction, much to the relief of the secondary piercer who seems less than happy about his job as bodyguard.

"You're all set!" She says, cheerfully, as her companion walks out of the room. Rosa gives her a tight smile. She smiles back.

She dresses as slowly as she can, savoring the feeling of having rings in her breasts once more. It hurts now but-- fuck she's glad to have them back. The ones in her ears, too. When she wraps her stolen cloak back around her she feels a little less anxious about her life and more like she's begun to pull the threads of her fate back into her hands.

* * *

Rosa can't find her way back to the hotel. It's dark, she's alone and her breasts are hurting more than she'd remembered. Ugh, childhood veneers over memories are the worst.

She spends an hour finding her way around and, when the tree-lined courtyard comes into sight, a local clock is chiming three. Her body is exhausted from the emotional battling she's been doing and there's not enough energy left to exert on worrying about Mindfang's reaction.

The worry still comes, however. It grows when she opens the hotel gate to see a few men searching the grounds with flashlights and she instinctively avoids them as she creeps up to the front door. When she steps into the lobby there's a remarkable amount of activity for how late it is.

It doesn't take much mental gymnastics to guess what's going on. She grabs one of the panicked workers and says, softly:

"Hello, I think my Matesprit reported me missing."

He goes dove gray. She smiles. Seconds later, she's being rushed to a small sitting room off the main lobby. Mindfang is sitting in an armchair looking incredibly broody, an entire decanter of brandy in her lap. That's not a shock whatsoever. What does surprise her is that Marcus is sitting across from her.

"I thought you were in Greece," Rosa says, absently, as she steps inside. "You must have taken a train to get here so quickly."
They both turn to stare at her. Mindfang doesn't have to turn so much as she lifts her head, but Marcus cranes his neck around and gapes.

"Close the door!" Mindfang barks, not bothering to attempt looking relieved. Rosa shoos the hotel employee from the room and shuts the door behind him. She remains standing before them, however, wanting to preserve her escape route.

The moment the door clicks shut, Mindfang is screaming. It's only Rosa's sense of extreme preservation that enables her to duck when the entire crystal decanter of brandy smashes on the wall inches from her face.

"WHERE THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN!?!?" She screeches, picking up a vase and throwing it. Rosa avoids that as well. "I AM GOING TO CUT YOUR FEET OFF DO YOU HEAR ME?! I AM GOING TO CUT THEM OFF WITH THE FIRE AXE AND GOUGE YOUR EYES OUT--"

"Calm down, Captain," Marcus says, sighing heavily. "Don't be so melodramatic. No one believes you."

"I certainly don't," Rosa mutters, giving Mindfang her best unassuming smile. "Because she'd have no one to follow her around if she permanently crippled me."

"I AM BEING PERFECTLY SERIOUS--"

"Vienna, shut up and eat some chocolate." Marcus groans, shoving a bowl of candy towards her. Mindfang takes it with a ferocious snarl and then proceeds to throw the bowl at Rosa as well. "DAMNIT, Vienna, we thought she was dead two minutes ago, can't you control yourself?!"

"NO! NO I CAN'T!"

"Should we just ignore her?" Rosa asks, softly. "Also, it's good to see you again, dear, I hope you've had a nice few days off of work?"

"ROSA I'M TALKING TO YOU--"

"I had a great visit to my property down in Greece then I made my way up here; I handle some of Vienna's accounts and this is a wonderful place to recruit our next crew," Marcus talks over the incoherent screaming and gets out of his chair to pour her a cup of tea. He stretches his arm over the couch to hand it to her and she warily approaches him to accept it.

Mindfang's rage is beginning to simmer down to a less virulent rage-- boiling sugar instead of oil. She's still growling, however, and Rosa immediately wants to throw herself at her feet and beg for mercy. She manages to keep her composure, however, and simply gives her a friendly 'who, little old me?' stare.

"Where the FUCK have you been?"

"I went for a walk," Rosa murmurs, innocently. "And I got lost. No one would give me directions."

"Bullshit. I'm going to light you on fire--" Mindfang lunges towards her and she jumps away, sloshing tea all over her hands. She swears.

"I visited the Sister's Shrine and got lost on my way back!" Rosa grumbles, glowering at her. "I didn't mean to be gone so long!"
"YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO BE GONE AT ALL!" Mindfang bellows, glancing around for another object to toss at her face. She doesn't find anything, which is a relief because Rosa's not in the mood to play dodge ball. "I TOLD YOU NOT TO GO!"

"It was go out and visit the shrine or try to hang myself," Rosa reasons, raising her eyebrows. "Which do you prefer?"

"YOU ARE NOT USING THREATS OF SELF HARM TO MAKE ME FEEL BAD."

"Same." Marcus mutters, softly. Rosa trills, sadly, and rubs one of his shoulders. He squirms into the gesture, smiling sadly. "Don't kill yourself, Rosie. Not worth it. It might hurt."

"I just had my breasts pierced, it's no trouble," Rosa murmurs, raising her eyebrows. "I don't think I'd be very successful at suicide, though. Too much effort."

"YOU DID WHAT?!"

"I got my piercings redone," Rosa shrugs, forcing herself to maintain the idea that she doesn't care how furious her mistress is. It's difficult, but is becoming surprisingly easier as Mindfang's rage grows to comical proportions.

"Are you kidding me? Really, Rosa? Really?" Mindfang snorts. "You went out and had a teenage rebellion, did you? That's cute."

"Oh shut up," Rosa hisses, reaching out an hand to wave at her angrily. "Just-- just stop saying words!"

Mindfang glares, darkly. "Excuse me?"

"I just--"

"You DO NOT TELL ME WHAT TO DO! DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?" Mindfang's looking at her with undisguised disgust. Rosa snarls back just as harshly, lips curled up past her gums. It's her body, isn't it? And if she wants to pierce it, she's allowed to. If she wants to cover it in ink, she can. Mindfang expressed an interest in the piercings, she expressed an interest in her tattoo work-- and, well, it makes Rosa happy--

"Obviously they're going to have to go," Mindfang mutters, more at Marcus than Rosa. "If we remove the rings and bars she'll heal up quick enough but the scarring is going to be a nightmare. Can those even be removed--"

"They're not going anywhere," Rosa says, thickly, her voice moving like cake batter that someone's forgotten to add eggs to. "I'm keeping the piercings and I'm sure as hell keeping the urge to slap you."

Mindfang ignores her. She keeps talking to Marcus as she swans around the room in a misguidedly righteous fury. She's in her breeches, boots and a button-down-- her sailor's gear-- but there's still sapphires on her neck and ears.

They've been looking for her, Rosa realizes slowly. They were scouring the streets for her which is-- well-- endearing. But they weren't looking around for a woman who they'd been worried might have gotten lost or been kidnapped. They'd been searching for a stray cat who'd wandered off and now they want to clean her up, put her collar back on and pretend it didn't happen.

The rage rises in a matter of seconds. Rosa curls her fingers around the teacup that had been stuffed
into her hands and wordlessly throws it. Her aim hasn't become any worse over the years and it hits
Mindfang squarely in the back of the head. The porcelain doesn't shatter, of course-- she's far enough
away that it doesn't happen-- but tea spills down her neck and the cup crashes-- shatters-- on the
floor.

Marcus stares at her, his normally pale skin bleaching in shock. Mindfang freezes, her shoulders
flying up towards her ears. Before Mindfang can turn and react Rosa has swept out of the room, past
the hotel employees waiting anxiously at the door.

She sweeps up the stairs three at a time. She's up to the third floor before she hears Mindfang's heels
clicking forward. There's the familiar cling of the elevator and Rosa huffs a little. By the time she
gets to the door, Mindfang is waiting.

They stare at each other. Mindfang's face is stiff with rage, as is Rosa's own. Mindfang gives her an
impatient snarl and Rosa finds herself snarling back. She shoves Mindfang aside and rushes into their
room.

Mindfang follows her, slamming, locking and bolting the door. Rosa ignores all this and stomps her
way across the room. Mindfang's eyes follow her with a single-minded fury. There isn't any more
kindness left for her and-- well-- Rosa isn't feeling too kind herself.

She fishes a few ice cubes from the ice bucket and, meeting Mindfang's furious stare, slips them
beneath her shirt. The sensation of ice against her breasts takes her breath away in a sharp hiss of
sensation. But, soon enough, the pain begins to fade. She doesn't allow herself to acknowledge the
arousal, or how badly she wants to pull Mindfang down onto their bed and prove herself.

But she doesn't. She leans against their little dining table and grimaces. They stand there, like statues,
facing off across the wide expanse of their room. The space is lit by moonlight streaming in from the
windowed balcony and a low-banking fire.

"Do you have anything you'd like to say to me, Pet?" Mindfang asks, snarling the word with a
nastiness that makes bile rise in her throat.

"No. No I don't." Rosa says, after some thought. "I would like to be alone."

Mindfang's nostrils flare as she forces herself to take a breath. Rosa counts to eight before she hears
her exhale, finally. "I'm going to give you one last chance to apologize to me and make amends."

Rosa gives her a look. She doesn't know what expression it can be most easily described as-- a
mixture of incredulity and dismissiveness. Mindfang's face hardens to alabaster. Rosa pulls the cork
from the half-empty bottle of wine and raises it to her lips. She downs a few swallows and they
remain awkwardly silent.

"I will not allow this. You know I will not allow it, Rosa--"

"You don't have the right to allow it." Rosa snaps, unable to keep it in anymore, slamming the bottle
onto the tabletop.

"Rosa--"

"What? What, are you going to hurt me? Beat me? Bully me? Put a collar around my neck and
remind me who I belong to?" Rosa throws her arms out and gestures at herself. Mindfang snarls at
the sight of it and Rosa snarls back. "Because believe you me I haven't forgotten for a second that
you bought me."
"Don't you dare, Rosa, don't you dare--" Mindfang starts towards her with quick, deliberate steps. She stops a few yards away, close enough that Rosa can see the little lines of tension crisscrossing her face.

"How much did I cost? How much per ounce of flesh? Did you pay more because of my fancy blood? How horrible must it seem that I've gone and decreased your return on investment." The words burn her lips as she says them but, well, they come out all the same. She wants to retch all over the carpet, pull out her hair-- scream-- light the place on fire-- rip Mindfang's face off--

Mindfang's "Damn right I paid more because of your blood. And guess what-- I own every inch of you and you have no right to-- to-- hurt my body--"

Rosa throws the bottle at her. This time it doesn't make its mark; Mindfang sees it coming and avoids it, deftly, and it shatters on the floor.

"It isn't yours." Rosa hisses, as furiously as she can. "It's mine."

"You're forgetting your place." Mindfang says, calmly, her voice going horrifyingly cold. "And I don't appreciate your tone."

"Did you ever love me?" Rosa asks. It's not kind-- not kind at all. She knows, somewhere in the complexity of her brain, that Mindfang loves her with a wholehearted devotion that's terrifying.

"I love you. If I only tell the truth once in my life it's when I say that I love you. And come heaven, come hell I will do whatever it takes to make you love me too. Even if that means I need to make you forget about anything but me. Even if I have to-- to-- take everything away from you--"

"That's not love." Rosa says, bitterly. "That's insanity and you can keep it."

"I don't care! Really, I don't! If I can't have you any other way than-- than-- chaining you to the foot of my bed and erasing all memories but of me, I'll do it! I will--"

"Then why haven't you?"

"Because damnit I don't want to!" Mindfang shoves Rosa against the table. Rosa snarls and Mindfang's face goes blank. She swallows, once before she speaks. "I keep hoping you might have a heart left to give me."

Rosa slaps her. Mindfang reels for a few seconds before she slaps her back.

"I don't know what I need to do, Rosa. I don't know what I need to tell you-- how I need to behave. But I know as well as you do that I can't let you go."

"I'm never going to care for you unless you do." Rosa says, softly. "You must know that."

"I-- I do-- but-- every time you go away-- every time you leave me-- you come back more broken. And I just want to see you whole."

"And you think it makes things better to force me into quiescence?" Rosa hisses, shoving Mindfang back. "Because it just makes me hate you."

"Don't say that!" Mindfang growls, looming towards her. Rosa turns on her heel and stomps away. Mindfang follows her. "Don't say that--"
"I have spent my whole life surrounded by people like you-- people who wanted nothing more than to bury me alive and see me die before I can be happy."

"I want you to be happy!"

"THEN WHY WON'T YOU LET ME!"

Mindfang grabs her by the shoulders. Rosa struggles for a few seconds, trying to slap her hands away, but Mindfang’s caught her gaze and has her blinded in seconds. Her brain is far too tumultuous to be fully coerced but, well, Mindfang tries. Admirably. And for a few seconds Rosa can't think of anything of how wonderful it feels to be touched by her, how beautiful she is, how devoted she is to Mindfang. "Because you aren't allowed to be happy without me."

The words sink in and, for a few moments, she believes it. Until, of course, her brain wakes up and realizes what’s going on. Ten seconds later, they're landing on the dining room table. The vase of flowers goes flying and joins the shattered wine bottle on the floor.

The table holds their weight but they’re soon crashing to the floor. Mindfang’s hands scrabble to grab her by the shoulders and throw her off but Rosa buries her nails into her arms until she feels blood. Mindfang yowls.

It’s not a fight Rosa intends on losing. They've fought before, of course, but she's never felt quite so righteous or nearly as determined to win. Mindfang gets her by the throat but she responds by raking her nails across the delicate skin of her neck so harshly that eight lines of virulent blue blood begins to stream across her skin. Mindfang lets go with an angry growl and pins her down.

Rosa kicks her, hard, and Mindfang-- not expecting that-- winces away. Rosa scrambles for power and, for the first time, manages to force her to the ground. Mindfang attempts to throw her off, of course, but Rosa stops her with a hiss.

The sound is long, loud and furious and Mindfang stops moving like she's been shot through the head. Her face goes blank and, automatically, she tucks her chin in close to her neck and keens. It's horribly difficult to see her so blatantly submissive but somehow she manages.

She wishes that were sarcasm but it isn't. Rosa pins Mindfang’s arms above her head with a nauseous feeling in her stomach-- half from rage half from discomfort at the situation.

Mindfang snarls at her in disgust over losing and Rosa snarls back.

"How can you say you love me when all you want nothing more than to control everything I do!?" She growls, showing all her teeth. She has lots of them. They're all sharp. "You just want to bury me alive like the rest of them!"

"Don't you dare--"

"Oh yes get permission--"

"I DON'T NEED PERMISSION! THEY'RE MY BREASTS! IT'S MY ARM!"

"That I bought--"

Rosa slaps her. It's a low blow since-- well-- she's literally trapped beneath her. But Mindfang's also relatively unable to fight back, so--

"You keep telling me how much I matter to you but you only want me so long as I heel."
"I don't want that!"

"Really? REALLY!? Because you've been doing a damn good job pretending to want-- that-- the thing--" She's losing her momentum. "I WANT TO PUNCH YOU IN THE FACE SO BADLY."

"I'M GOING TO BEAT THE SHIT OUT OF YOU THE SECOND I CAN GET UP!"

Rosa hisses again, the angriest rattlesnake sound she can make. Mindfang isn't nearly as cowed by it as she was last time. "SHUT UP! STOP ACTING LIKE TROLL EDWARD CULLEN! NO ONE FINDS THAT ATTRACTIVE. AT ALL."

"WHO THE FUCK IS THAT!?" Mindfang jabs a knee into her thighs as best as she can. It's not very successful, but it does make her angry.

"A FICTIONAL CHARACTER THAT YOU'RE ACTING LIKE AND I HATE IT. I HATE YOUR STUPID-- STUPID FACE--"

"Rosa--?"

"JUST CAN YOU STOP BEING SO-- SO-- WONDERFUL IF YOU'RE GOING TO ACT LIKE SUCH A TOTAL BITCH ALL OF THE TIME!?" Rosa slaps her in the shoulders, repeatedly. Mindfang seizes the opportunity to use her hands and slaps Rosa's hands away.

Mindfang lets out a furious kitten-screech. "YEAH, WELL, MAYBE I WOULDN'T HAVE TO BE SUCH A BITCH IF YOU WEREN'T SO FUCKING MOPEY! 'Oh my kid is dead!' WHO FUCKING CARES IT'S BEEN A YEAR!"

"I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT YOU'D--" Rosa ends with a sharp intake of breath, feeling as if she's been stabbed between her shoulder blades and just now noticed the knife point sticking out of her heart.

"STOP CRYING ALL THE TIME AND FUCKING DEAL WITH IT." Mindfang snaps, throwing her off. Rosa lands beside her with an 'oof' of pain. "ALSO STOP WITH THE SUICIDE ATTEMPTS! WHAT THE HELL AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WHEN EVERY TIME I LEAVE YOU ALONE YOU TRY TO KILL YOURSELF!?"

She mercifully gets to her feet instead of going for the death blow. Rosa scrambles to her feet herself, using one of the velvet armchairs to pull herself to her feet. She's shaking when she stands, her face flushed with anger.

"I DO NOT--" She begins to say, only to realize that-- well-- she kind of has been doing that, hasn't she?

"YOU DO TOO! I SPENT SIX HOURS LOOKING FOR YOUR CORPSE TONIGHT BECAUSE I WAS SO SURE YOU'D GONE AND HUNG YOURSELF SOMEWHERE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND HOW AFRAID I WAS!?" Her voice is hitting a shrill pitch that Rosa's never heard her emit before and it's only then that she looks a little closer and realizes that, perhaps, she actually was upset; her eyes are rimmed with virulent blue and she looks like she's about to cry again. "I was fifteen minutes away from calling the morgue, Rosa--"

"Well you could have started with that instead of laying into me like I'm nothing more than an ignorant child." Rosa snaps, giving Mindfang a haughty stare. Mindfang begins to growl, softly, and Rosa growls back.

"You are an ignorant child compared to me," Mindfang spits. Rosa glowers. One of the ice cubes
drops out of her bra. It's very uncomfortable. Mindfang's glare goes from 'angry' to 'horrifically furious'.

"Just-- I can't--" She huffs, loudly, and begins again. "I don't want to live like this. I've spent so much of my life living for other people and-- and I can't do it anymore. I can't."

Rosa sinks onto the arm of the armchair and groans, hiding her face in her hands. "I met you and you were-- I thought you were so different. That even if you were keeping me as a slave I'd have a chance to be alive again but--"

She doesn't cry. She's not about to give Mindfang any satisfaction of the sort. "You keep saying you love me. But all you want is to have me so you can say you have someone."

"I am not--"

"Do you want me to be happy? I can pretend to be happy. I can do that until the day I die. Because it seems to me that you don't care if I'm happy so long as I'm good at pretending I am."

"Rosa--"

"I really would quite like to tear your face off right now." She says, ending with a huff that turns into a scream. "What are you finding so hard to understand?!"

"I don't understand what I did to make you so angry!"

"You just-- you just don't understand that if you're going to treat me like your slave you'll never get anything more from me than clinical devotion," Rosa hisses, stomping across the room and shoving her, hard. Mindfang shoves her back. "You can make me love you and I'll always hate you for it."

"THEN HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO WIN!?"

"Treat me like I'm more than your poorly groomed lapdog! Act like I'm-- I'm-- better than a cute little doll that learned to talk." Rosa's voice breaks, painfully. "I just need to feel like I'm real. And you don't treat me like that."

"Annora--"

"Vienna, please. I-- I can't-- I can't love you because you don't understand the difference between a devoted slave and a harried lover."

"But I do love you." Mindfang claims, desperately. "You can't leave me--"

"I'M NOT LEAVING YOU." Rosa wants to shake her back and forth until her brain begins to work again. "I'm telling you I want to murder you in a decidedly platonic way because you seem incapable of understanding how to love someone else."

"But I love--"

"YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG." Rosa snarls, her shoulders flitting up to her ears and her fangs going as sharp as razors. "AND I AM SO DONE WITH THIS."

She slaps Mindfang's hands away from her shoulders with several angry screeches that aren't exactly suited to the situation whatsoever, since she's trying to make a dignified exit.

Instead, when she turns to sweep towards the door, Mindfang throws herself after her and makes a terrible attempt to stop her from leaving.
"You are not going anywhere!" Mindfang threatens, narrowing her eyes to an utterly disconcerting gaze of seven and one.

"Is that an order?"

"Yes!"

Rosa kicks her in the shins. Very hard. She's wearing Mindfang's steel capped boots, still, so it's not surprising when Mindfang doubles over howling in pain.

"HAVE YOU BEEN LISTENING TO ME AT ALL!?" She shouts at the back of Mindfang's head, throwing the door to their suite open. "DAMNIT VIENNA, DO YOU EVEN CARE IF I'M HAPPY!?"

And, still glowering, she slams the door. Hard.
in which the author is mean but it does come out ok

Chapter Summary

Rosa lets out some pent up feelings, Mindfang's feelings are hurt, Rosa gets mad again, things are sad. They have a wonderful dinner among other things and then there's a lot of drunken discussion. All in all, a usual day in the life. Now with more Marcus!

Chapter Notes

So it has been a while since I have updated, for which I am sincerely sorry. My life has been sort of hectic lately. I was Marc Antony in my college's Julius Caesar which was, as you may imagine, a lot of work. In addition to that, both of my pain conditions have gotten worse and I started immunosuppressant therapy to treat my arthritis. Unfortunately, immunosuppressant therapy is conducted with small doses of chemotherapy which makes you feel *awful* if you weren't aware and I've just been sort of... frazzled. But this chapter is quite long and I hope it makes up for any pain and suffering.

Thank you to everyone who has stuck with me this long. After this chapter we're getting back to sea I PROMISE. They were supposed to get back on board at the end of this chapter but then I checked the page count and it was getting a little... long. But if it'll keep you around, we're getting another Ancestor in the next chapter, who's arrival is foreshadowed in this chapter. It's pretty obvious, you'll get it. Happy reading!

PS: A special thank you to all of my wonderful writing consultants who have spent the past month or so reading obnoxious snippets of fiction while I anxiously await their opinion. You guys are the best and I don't know what I'd do without you. I can't remember your a03 names because it's 3am but you know who you are and will harass me about it later anyways.

Rosa slams the door hard enough that the paintings on the walls shake. A few doors open and curious faces peek out. They retreat within seconds of viewing her snarl and it makes her feel just a little bit better to realize she's *feared*. Even if Mindfang doesn't respect her-- well-- that doesn't hurt as badly when she knows Mindfang's the only one.

Marcus is leaning on the wall just outside their suite. He gives her a wry smile and gestures towards the room with his horns. "She need a vet?"

"Well she *is* a bitch but I don't want to have her put down," Rosa snaps, kicking the door *hard* to make her point.

It doesn't do much more than make her toes hurt and she lets out a pained screech akin to the call of a parakeet with laryngitis. Marcus winces.

He pats her on the back, hesitantly, his touch light at first and slowly growing more firm when she
doesn't immediately react with fury. "Shhh, shhh, shhh, you're fine, Darling--"

"DON'T call me Darling." She lashes out, hard, shaking his hand off so quickly it smacks into the wall in a sickening noise of bone on dry wall. "Oh goodness-! Marcus, I'm so sorry--"

Marcus looks less than pleased but he doesn't breathe a single irritable syllable. "You need a drink, Nora."

"I just want to feel like someone cares about me--" She begins to say, her voice aching with agonizingly suppressed emotion. "And she doesn't."

"Nora, I adore you but you must know how stupid you're being when you say that." Marcus mutters, spinning her around and shoving her down the hallway. "C'mon. We're going to get you a cuppa and then we'll talk about it."

Rosa tries to shake him off but that doesn't work so well; he's strong and determined, two things that make it difficult for her to be angry with him. "I want alcohol."

"We will put brandy into your tea. Will that be okay?"

"...Okay."

"And then we'll have a nice long chat, huh? Does that sound good?" Marcus smiles, condescendingly, and starts to stroke her hair. It feels nice and, after just a few strokes she feels the worst of her anger start to subside. The moment she realizes that he's shushing her, however, she's less than pleased.

She hisses, low and long in the depths of her chest. Marcus freezes, immediately. "Stop petting me or I'll break your neck."

Marcus removes his hand, slowly. "Alright, Nora, let's not be rash--"

"I really want to kill something." She growls. Marcus shakes his head and places his hand at the small of her back, nudging her down the hallway. She doesn't raise any more words in protest; he's not shushing her or pissing her of-- he's simply guiding her along and she can live with that.

He has a room at the end of the hall, which is rather perfect given the circumstances. Seeing as she has blood on her fingers and her hair is a nest of flyaways and can't seem to control her homicidal urges, walking to another hotel won't work out so well. Marcus ushers her into the suite and immediately makes a beeline for the bar; he pours her a glass of something and she drinks it without taking the time to identify what it is. Marcus whistles, slowly.

"More?" She asks, gruffly, sounding a little more like Mindfang than she's really wish.

"No." Marcus undoes the buttons of his coat in a few deft gestures. It's beginning to fray around the cuffs and hem and Rosa spends a few moments fretting over the wool before responding. "No, I'm not giving you anything more until you calm down so that we can talk about this like adults."

Rosa presses her face into her hands and collapses onto the couch. "No. I don't feel comfortable with that."

"What the fuck Annora. What more do you possibly need from me?"

"I don't know. I don't like talking about feelings--"
"That's what a Moirail is for, Annora."

"Are you my Moirail?"

"No shit I'm your Moirail." Marcus grumbles, rolling up his shirtsleeves with precise folds. "What did you think, huh? Do you need a formal proposal?"

"Yes."

"Well you're not getting that." He sighs and wraps his arms around her shoulders, squeezing her. The space left between his horns presses against her neck and gives her enough room to rest her head on his.

"...Thanks." Rosa whispers, after a pause. "You're... a good friend."

Marcus squeezes her hand. His hand is vastly warmer than Mindfang's and she allows herself to luxuriate at his touch. His hands are rougher than Mindfang's which is strange enough, but the heat is more than adequate to make up for it.

"Rosa, you're freezing," Marcus scolds, squeezing her hand. "Honestly. I'd expect this from the Captain, not you."

Rosa winces and allows Marcus to cuddle her. He pulls a blanket up around her shoulders and they burrow against one another. "Why doesn't she care about me?"

"Don't be stupid Annora, of course she cares about you."

"She acts like she does but she doesn't really. She just thinks she does." Rosa fidgets with the brooch at her shoulder, leaving fingerprints along the face of the silver. "She just seems to expect that I'll be absolutely flattered to have her attention and I just-- I-- One moment she's like 'you're too meek and sad!' and then six seconds later she's like 'ugh you're awful I hate it when you do that just do whatever I say'."

"Awww, Nora-- don't take it personally--"

"I'll take it personally if I want to take it personally! She clearly means it personally. I just-- I can't-- I can't live the rest of my life just doing whatever I'm told. I've spend the past five decades doing that and I am tired of being controlled."

"Nora-- darling--"

"What?"

"My little friend, it's not just you she does that with, you know. It's just how she is, Annora." Marcus strokes her hair and she leans into the caress this time around. "That's just how Vienna is. She likes to get things her own way, you know? She-- she can't let someone else be in charge. I mean, fuck, the Widow is my ship! I'm the captain! But she's been sailing it for so long that she can't bring herself to let her go!"

"...She's your ship?"

"Yes, she's my fucking ship. But Vi worries after her too much and after me too much that she doesn't even sail her own damn flagship."

Rosa steals his cognac when he's not looking. "That's awful! We should light her on fire!"
"No, Annora, we shouldn't because she knows she's an overbearing, sociopathic, possessive, controlling, emotionally manipulative bitch."

"I just. I don't mind her being bossy. I can handle bossy. I can handle pushy. But I can't handle the... constant need to control everything I do."

"Well I recommend refusing sex until she's nicer."

"I just lost my virginity to her last night, I don't know how effective that would be."

"Oh you have got to be kidding me-- you can't be serious! How the hell did you manage that?"

"I just said no, Marcus."

"Do not take this personally when I tell you that I assumed you've been going at it since they day I brought you home."

"You make me sound like a stray kitten."

"Sorry dear. I just didn't know a more tactful way to say that I sort of assumed the Captain was having sex with her... um... sex slave."

"Touché. Rosa groans, flopping into Marcus's lap. He winces and moves her horns far away from anything that could be seriously damaged by sharp head movements. "I just. I thought she liked me."

"She does like you. She's madly in love with you, darling. She's just... sort of a needy idiot."

"...Really?" Rosa squalls as Marcus starts to rub her neck. Ohhhh. Ohhhh, that's nice. She likes that. It doesn't take very much effort on his part to send her into a state of half comatose bliss. Oh goodness she can't remember the last time someone's given her a backrub. It feels good to have someone touching her platonically, without having to worry what it might mean in the long run.

He knows his way around muscles, working his fingertips against her vertebra and between her shoulder blades like she's a cat who's fallen asleep on his favorite chair and he's attempting to pacify her before moving her. The tension melts out of her slowly, her shoulders relaxing to a hitherto unknown position on her back; she didn't even know she was that stiff, but Marcus is finding six hundred different places that are as solid as gold bullion. But his hands are warm enough to melt away the pain into something far more akin to gold leaf, thinner and more gossamer than vellum. She expresses her appreciation loudly and quite frequently.

"Honey if this is what you sound like with the Captain, I don't know how she held out so long."

Rosa makes an angry noise and tries to shove herself out of Marcus's lap. He shoves her back down as easily as if he's a seasoned sailor and she's an emaciated slave girl. "Because she doesn't really find me that attractive and she only wanted to sleep with me because it was easy and now she doesn't want to deal with the emotional baggage?"

Marcus shushes her. "You're a beautiful woman with a lot to offer her. And she knows that. She's an idiot-- she's not stupid. If that woman doesn't know what she's got, I'll teach her."

"I don't know what's wrong with her." Rosa growls, slapping the couch cushion. "I want to light her on fire."

"She's a crazy pirate who spends most of her free time writing about people and attempting to blow things up. Her friends mostly consist of drunken slobs who mostly want to spend time with her.
because she's rich and has a great rack. I am no exception, except that I also enjoy fine art."

Marcus’s hands slip beneath the collar of her shirt and he rests her palm against her spine. She sighs, heavily, and for once doesn’t feel worse for it.

"Nora, do you understand what I’m saying? She doesn’t know what the hell she's doing. You're the only woman she's been friendly with since I have met her. And I'm not saying you should treat her any differently, but as far as social interaction goes... she's awful." Marcus helps her sit up. She does so grudgingly, melting onto the other side of the couch. He slips off of the couch and trots across the room. This time he brings the entire bottle of cognac with him. When he flops onto the couch, he hands the bottle to her without a word.

Marcus watches her drink with raised eyebrows. He doesn’t try to cut her off this time, however. "She's terrified of screwing up and then, instead of doing something sensible, just fucks herself over even more by trying to compensate for her ineptitude and-- well-- it's a death spiral."

"She says she loves me." Rosa mumbles over the mouth of the bottle. "I don't think she does."

"Well. If she says it, she believes it. I don't think Fang's the type to, y'know. Lie about that." Marcus reaches up and pats her hand. "Lie to get sex, oh yeah definitely, but lie about something just to hurt you? No. That takes too much forethought."

Marcus steals the bottle from her. "Also you get touchy when you drink and we are not going there, so cool it on the booze."

"Mine." Rosa mutters, sulkily, pulling one of the velvet throw pillows to her chest. "I don't have anything else. She owns every stitch of clothing on my body-- ugh-- she even owns me."

"Well. You're kind of a downer, aren't you?"

"I hate my life."

"No you don't. You're the lapdog of an extremely attractive pirate and are spoilt absolutely rotten, not to mention she's madly in love with you and really good in bed."

"...You do understand that the root of the issue is that I don't want to be the lapdog of the pirate?"

"Oh, no I get that. You'd be a lapdog even if you weren't her slave. You just seem like the type perfectly happy to lounge around enjoying herself and, y'know. Only biting when you're unhappy."

"I have spent every waking moment of my life fighting to stay alive. I have battled the imperial army, the undead, more of the undead and rabid newborns. I frequently had tea with the Grand Highblood when he visited the breeding caverns and you are comparing me to a Pomeranian?"

"Just saying. You seem like you sort of like having a break from the, uh, murdering and pillaging. So you're feeling a little complacent. That happens to all of us. Do you really want to give up all of this?" Marcus makes a grand gesture around the suite, the gold rings on his fingers gleaming. "Shit I sure as hell wouldn't. Just make sure she knows who's boss."

"She's boss."

"Well, technically but let's be honest here, she's in love with you, you're totally going to win any fight you have. Just refuse to have sex with her and she will cave."

"That's awful Marcus."
"To be fair... she's also sort of awful." Marcus shrugs, patting her knee. "She's an interesting woman--she sticks to her guns, she's good in a fight and the best conversationalist you'll ever meet. But she's also, you know. Sort of a total bitch."

Rosa laughs. It's a dry chuckle at first but-- rapidly-- it dissolves into hysterical giggles. Marcus joins her after a few seconds and before too many minutes have passed, the two of them are absolutely incoherent. Rosa's the first one to stop laughing, still wiping tears from her eyes and breathing like a whale stranded on the beach after inadvertently deciding it was possible to swim on sand.

"You're going to be just fine, sweetheart." Marcus mutters, patting her feet. "Now. Do you want to sit here and drink or do you want me to paint your nails? Because I might have accidentally taken the wrong suitcase off the train and now own way too many cosmetics."

"...Can we paint them blue to distract her more easily when we fight again tomorrow morning?"

"Yeah, we're totally doing that. Lessgo." Marcus springs off the couch like a possessed panther, his legs nearly flying out from beneath him. It's nothing like Mindfang's controlled, sultry gait and for that she's absolutely grateful. Marcus moves like a man who's still on a ship, bouncing around the room and resting his hands on every free surface to keep his balance. His fingers drum on everything for the quickest hair of a second and watching him rummage through his suitcase is like watching an eel wending his way through a coral reef.

There isn't a trace of the self-possessed haughtiness that Rosa loves to watch in Mindfang and it's a warming sentiment. Marcus isn't the smartest man she's ever met. He's utterly solid-- down to earth and the one you rely on to hold down the fort. He's hardly likely to take her on a tour of an art museum, nor is he likely to spend hours reading her poetry while she knits and interrupting her in the middle of each row to explain something about an iamb that can only be understood if you look at it right now.

She could survive without that, couldn't she? She'd be perfectly happy spending all her time with Marcus, hoping he'll have a few spare seconds for her in between securing rigging, darning sails and ministering order on his ship.

...No. No, maybe she wouldn't like that. She sort of likes the poetry, the out of date plays and the effort it takes to distract a certain pirate away from tangling her yarn. And as much as she loves Marcus... he's kind of... well...

Twitchy. She doesn't do twitchy on a long term basis. She had quite enough of that in her history with a certain photophobic young man. Although it was quite fun to shine a flashlight through his windows and watch him panic. And while twitch is tolerable for a few days-- eventually she'd be forced to bash his skull in with a lamp to make him sit still.

But his energy is something nice. Something she needs, now of all days. It makes her feel like she needs to keep going, no matter what the cost. She can see why Mindfang keeps him around. He might be a solid, straight-minded sailor but he's a damn good one and a reliable man to boot. But he loves what he does and it gives him a vibrant energy that Rosa doesn't think she'll ever get tired of.

"C'mon. I found some sapphire glitter, let's do this." Marcus scrabbles back to her in an impressive tangle of limbs and flourishing of white hair.

Rosa stares ad him. "...I'm confused. What happened to the nail polish?"

"I keep forgetting you grew up in a cave." Marcus cracks open the battle and, without asking, swipes a line of nail polish across the back of her hand. It is clearly nail polish. It is clearly blue. And it is
clearly sparkly. Rosa understands what he meant, immediately, and turns jade with embarrassment.

"No, I grew up in a desert in a rather lovely six bedroom lake house. Well. It would have been a lake house if I would have had a lake but it was meant to be a lake house." Rosa mutters, bitterly. "I just happened to live in cave from eighteen until twenty-seven. And sporadically from twenty-seven until fifty-four."

"Yeah, if you spent the majority of your lifetime in a cave, you grew up in a cave."

"Shut up, Marcus." Rosa mumbles. "Can't you just... make me better?"

"No, Annora. I can't." Marcus murmurs, sighing and squeezing her knee. "But I can try to help you make yourself feel better."

Rosa gives him a tired smile, feeling, once more, that she's got a sixty pound weight on her back, keeping her breathing anxious and shallow. "Thanks."

"You'll be fine. Just take a deep breath and complain." Marcus says, cheerfully. "And if worst comes to worst, there's always more alcohol."

"Oh thank goodness." Rosa breathes and they both laugh.

* * *

She sleeps curled up in Marcus's bed while he takes up residence on the couch, despite her insistence that she doesn't mind sharing. But he stays awake until she falls soundly asleep, finding it difficult without Mindfang fidgeting at her side. But she manages, somehow.

He wakes her up shortly after nine, shaking her shoulders softly.

"I stole some of your clothes while Vienna was in the shower." He says, by way of an answer when she makes bewildered noises about the swathe of fabric that's suddenly deposited on top of her. "C'mon. You've gotta go talk to her."

"No, I don't. I can just stay here and wait for her to die. I'll outlive her by at least twenty years."

"For the love of-- Annora, get up and go talk to her!" Marcus does not give her a choice; he shoves her onto the floor when she tries to go back to sleep and threatens to pour a pitcher of water on her head when she won't get dressed. She pulls the dress on with a series of mumbled threats. Marcus is only saved by the fact that he bought her a dress she has yet to wear and likes quite a bit.

"You're just going to lie around sulking all day, cry a bit, drink more and cry more unless you two fix this and considering how well I know the Captain, she's just going to find a way to legally obligate you to apologize and sign away your free will."

Rosa gives him an arch stare. "Do you want to rephrase that, Marcus?"

"Nope. We both know how far under your thumb she is." He shoves her forward, reassuringly, as if you can even do that. "C'mon. Gotta face the dragon."

"But she can be so mean--"

"No. No she's gotta face you." Marcus says, cheerfully, clapping her on the shoulders.

She gives him a grateful smile. "Oh. Well. That makes me feel much better."
Rosa wouldn't ever do this willingly. That's all she can think about as she's shoved along down the stairs by her increasingly obnoxious Moirail. She's not entirely sure she ever wants to see Mindfang again; she's feeling far more disposed towards lighting her bed on fire while she's asleep and watching while she burns. At least part of her feels that way. The rest of her just wants to make her sleep on the floor for a few nights until her affection is bought back with an entire garden's worth of flowers. And probably lots of expensive jewelry, because let's face it, one thing last far longer than the others.

But she's been reminded of the reason why she was uncomfortable pursuing a romantic relationship with this woman, and now that the thoughts are back in her head, she can't get rid of them. There's always going to be a painful imbalance between them, Mindfang taking control of her every move even when she promises she's not and Rosa pretending she's not continually worrying about doing something reprehensible and being slain for it.

Marcus is, however, standing behind her and glowering like a particularly albino meteor, and she has no recourse but to muster her courage, screw it to the sticking post and slap some sense into an aggravated pirate.

Her quarry is sitting at the dining room table, glaring into a cup of coffee. She's repeatedly dragging the tines of a silver fork across a half-cleared plate of waffles and there is, of course, a half-empty bottle of champagne on the table. She's the only one left in the dining room, an outdated newspaper spread out before her.

Rosa shoves the door open the rest of the way and stalks inside. She doesn't feel particularly beautiful or elegant or well-dressed. But she's got one thing on her side and that thing is that she isn't the one in the wrong here.

Mindfang glances up from the tabletop and snarls, reflexively. Rosa glares back and takes a few nervous footsteps closer to her table.

"Well?" She snaps and Rosa gives her an incredulous glare, pulling her shawl more tightly around her shoulders to match the fury of Mindfang's stare by hiding herself with cashmere. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

Rosa falls silent for a few moments, utterly shocked by the audacity of her statement. Oh for the love of-- Honestly?

"I was coming to see if you'd pulled your head out of your ass yet." Rosa growls, resisting the urge to stab her with a fork. "But clearly that's never going to happen so I might as well take my leave."

She does the ladylike thing and does not try to hit Mindfang with the teapot. Neither does she attempt to tip her chair over, although that is incredibly tempting. Instead she turns on her heel to sweep out of the room, her shoe leaving a black mark on the marble. She's not even halfway to the door when Mindfang gets her hands on her, fingers curling painfully tightly on her upper arm. Mindfang's growling like a furious goose and it's not at all intimidating but it is sort of characteristic of how ridiculous she can be.

"Take your hands off me."

"What did you just say?" Mindfang hisses, fingernails digging into Rosa's skin. True to her word, Rosa grabs her hand, twists her wrist around and snaps her fingers all the way back against her knuckles. Mindfang yelps.
"That I was going to break your fingers for being a heinous bitch." Rosa says, through gritted teeth, smacking away the hand that immediately flies towards her throat. "Don’t even think about it, Vienna. I think we both know I could win this fight if I felt like it."

"This isn’t a fight."

"Oh, really? Because I’m pretty sure it is." Rosa stomps on her foot before releasing her hand. Mindfang’s fingers aren’t broken, of course. She's angry, not petulant. Unlike some people. But her Mistress immediately slink away, retreating to the other side of the table to sulk.

"Should we start over? Perhaps with you giving a heartfelt apology and my ignoring it until you give a better one?"

"I hate you."

"Oh, forgive me for being the first woman to dare to call you out on being awful."

"What did I do?!"

"YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID, VIENNA."

"...Can't we just pretend none of that ever happened and get over it?" She asks, perfectly seriously.

"NO, NO WE CANNOT." Rosa slams her hands into the table so hard that it shifts a few inches towards Mindfang, who finally looks properly aghast. "Do you not understand what it means to have someone trust you? What it means to hold someone's happiness in your hands? Because I have given that to you! I gave you my trust! And I've let you push me around as much as you want because damnitall I don't care what happens to me."

Rosa accompanies each statement with a slam of hands on the edge of the table until Mindfang has a table shoved against her stomach and looks slightly trepidatious.

"I'm happy to do whatever you want because, quite frankly, usually you don't want anything more than for someone to pay attention to you since you have the self-worth of an outdated dictionary--"

"Hey!" Mindfang gasps, like she's been slapped-- she even turns her face and somehow musters a blush. It's an impressive performance. Rosa throws a saucer at her face. (She ducks). Actually, it's more of a cringe; she presses her chin into her collarbone and curls up on herself, hands curling around her horns. Normally this sort of behavior would be endearingly pathetic. As things stand... the urge to murder just grows stronger.

"But damnitall I respect myself enough to demand that you appreciate my complacency by understanding when you've been awful and need to apologize!" She's worked herself into a frenzy, tears burning the backs and fronts of her eyes. "So stop acting like you're so perfect and give me a good apology!"

"Annora--" Mindfang tries to say, shoving the table away from her own stomach. Her breakfast dishes shift.

"No!" Rosa yelps, slapping the tabletop again. "You do not get to call me that!"

"Rosa--"

"I'm going to go back to my bedroom and coming back when I don't want to murder you anymore\"
and if you have any hope of salvaging whatever scraps of a relationship we have left you had better have a good apology, do you hear me?"

"...Please don't be mad?" Mindfang whispers, pleadingly, attempting to skitter around the table. "Please don't do this to me, Rosa--"

"TOO LATE." Rosa snarls, throwing a teacup at her. "If you can't even handle my being out of your sight for more than an hour, how the hell could I have thought that you'd be able to feel guilty for taking advantage of me!"

She doesn't throw the teapot at her as a parting blow. But she's tempted. Instead, she sweeps out of the room just as dramatically as she came in, this time pausing to slam the sliding door shut behind her.

Marcus is, of course, drinking tea in the lobby when she flourishes outside with her shawl billowing out behind her.

"Hello there--"

"I want to break her face in with the nearest ship in a bottle. If I murder her, do I get her property?"

"Seeing as you are her property, I don't think you can inherit." Marcus crosses his legs and hands her a cheese danish. She stuffs it down her throat without second thought.

Marcus makes her sit down next to him and places a comforting arm over her shoulders. "Do you want revenge on the mean pirate?"

"Yes." Rosa mumbles.

"Do you want to buy crazy underwear and hand her the receipt and then refuse to show her."

"...Yes. I would like that, please."

* * *

They don't talk very much while they wander around the city. They do, however, spend a ridiculous amount of Mindfang's money, which makes Rosa feel a little less angry and a little more inclined towards forgiveness. But just a little. They do buy an insane amount of inordinately expensive lingerie, Marcus absolutely at ease in a store full of women who regard him anxiously and they even stop in at a dress shop and buy her more clothes.

She doesn't need more clothes but they make her happy so Marcus insists. They save their conversation for late afternoon, awkwardly making themselves comfortable on a pair of wrought iron chairs outside of a cafe. Marcus gets them lunch and coffee-- she partakes in neither.

He tries in vain to make her eat-- "At least drink something!"-- but she chooses to remain obstinately quiet.

"Do you want to talk about her?"

"No. I mean. Perhaps? Can I just-- I don't know-- make her understand somehow? Hit it into her with a heavy wrench?"

Marcus laughs and downs the rest of his coffee, giving her an impressed stare. "You can try. But, you know... Vienna is Vienna. You're the first woman she's talked to for more than an hour without
trying to hide."

"...Really?"

"She does not enjoy the company of other women. She'll sleep with them and run, she'll play poker and steal their money and she'll blackmail them but she does not make any effort to keep them."

"So I should be flattered that she threatens to lock me up in order to keep me around?"

"No. No, not really." Marcus chuckles, raising an eyebrow. "But-- well-- I mean. I'm just saying that she's out of her league just saying good morning to you each day, let alone forging a relationship."

Rosa snorts and fidgets with the salt shaker. "Forging? I would prefer to refer to it as slash and burning a relationship."

"Well. I'm just saying... she might be awful but don't... y'know... take it personally?" He shrugs, the tattoos covering his neck distorting themselves into random patterns.

"I'll try, Marcus. I-- I mean-- I like her. I really do." Rosa murmurs, wrapping her arms around herself. "But does she really like me?"

"Probably." Marcus says, laughing. "She hasn't killed you yet, has she?"

Rosa crosses her legs and drops her head back like she's a broken mannequin. "It's awful that hearing you say that makes me feel better."

"Welcome to the crew." Marcus murmurs, patting her hand. "You'll get used to it."

* * *

They get back by four. It's been over six hours since she last attempted to murder her Mistress. Rosa can't stop thinking about her, suppressing the furious need to meddle that always comes up at the most inappropriate of times.

As angry as she is, she doesn't want Mindfang to be sad. She wants her to be penitent, not anguished. Well. Maybe a little anguished but not horribly so. But she doesn't always want to be the one giving in so, instead, she sits in one of the many lounges and stares at a piano while Marcus goes off on a rant about the merits of mermaid lore beside her that is completely calculated to make her laugh.

He's comfortably warm and she lets him hold her hand while she considers the merits of lighting the hotel on fire to burn off some steam. But before she can ring for a maid to get some matches, one of the bellmen tracks her down.

"The Marquise would like to see you, ma'am. I'm supposed to ask you not to bring any porcelain with you and that she's attempting to be mature this time around so don't hate her."

He seems bemused as he relays the message and Rosa blushes. Oh for the love of all heavens, she's embarrassing. But... well... it's an effort.

"I'm going to go talk to Vienna, Marcus. If I don't come down after an hour, I'm either dead or having... um... well. You're an adult."

Marcus sends her out of the room with laughter. "You're adorable!"
She takes the stairs a few at a time, feet not entirely willing to go. But she goes, all the same, inexorably marching towards what could be certain doom. After all--

Well. There are a lot of 'after alls' to be considered. But hopefully one of them won't entail Mindfang murdering her for stupid reasons.

She pushes the door open without knocking. The room has been cleaned while she slept down the hall, next to Marcus in a bed free of jasmine perfume or cold skin. It must have been the reason why Mindfang was downstairs earlier instead of waiting in her temporary lair. The cleanup must have been… intensive. The broken glass has been swept away, the furniture has been replaced and-- if she lies to herself well enough-- it's like their fight never happened. But Mindfang's sitting at the table looking far too worse for wear, eyes rimmed in angry blue circles and hair unbrushed. Along the formerly pristine marble she can see the remnants of spilt red wine and deep, angry gashes in the stone and if there's anything that will be permanent, it's that mark in the stone.

"You wanted to see me?" Rosa asks, softly, hoping that-- for once-- she might get the answer she's looking for. Mindfang nods and gestures halfheartedly at the chair across the table from her. Rosa crosses the room incredibly slowly.

There's a single sheet of paper sitting on the table before her. Rosa eyes it, warily, and, from the gleam of a gilded and notarized seal, it doesn't take her long to process that it's her papers.

Mindfang raises the paper and asks, quietly "Do you know what this is?"

"My deed." Rosa says, gagging on the words. Mindfang nods and then, wordlessly, folds it in half. Then in quarters. Rosa watches each fold with an increasing sense of panic. It's as if Mindfang is holding something crucial before her; something that means far more than it should considering that she regards it as nothing more than a meaningless formality. With each fold of the paper, anxiety floods up into her mouth and she can barely keep her composure.

Once it's folded into what has to be sixteenths, at the least, Mindfang gives Rosa a tight smile. Then, she reaches out and places it before her.

"I know... I know it can't make up for how I've been." Mindfang murmurs, deliberately slowly, saying words that have clearly been rehearsed. "But I want you to know that... my feelings for you are legitimate. And I don't want you to feel-- obligated to return my affections. No matter how much I want you to."

Rosa stares at her, numbly. A feeling of warm shock is spreading over her, as if she's been eased into a hot bath straight out of the ice cold night. The silence between them is so thick Rosa feels like she could reach out and grasp it in her hands then tear it to shreds.

She doesn't look into Mindfang's eyes. She reaches out and unfolds the paper with trembling hands.


"I can't... I can't turn you over to yourself. But... Without that I can't prove you're-- Well. I can't prove that you're my property." Mindfang makes an uncomfortable gesture then folds her hands back into her lap. She's wearing an obscene amount of rings and Rosa watches as she spins each of them around her fingers, an anxious habit that she's never seen before. "So. Um. Yes."

Rosa folds the paper back up, fingernails sealing the creases. Mindfang watches each gesture with the expression of a woman in fear for her life. Rosa slips the paper into her bodice and it's a
wonderfully empowering gesture.

"Thank you." Rosa murmurs. "I appreciate it."

"You're right. I haven't been... well... I haven't been very gentlewomanly with my affections. And-- in the spirit of full disclosure... I wasn't at all prepared for how strongly I would feel about you when I went looking for you." Mindfang fidgets with her coffee cup. "L.. I haven't had such strong emotions for anyone else since Eadric."

The way she says it makes Rosa pause. She thinks around the words for a few moments before she realizes the phrasing is wrong. Looking for her?

"You were looking for me?" Rosa asks, softly.

"Rosa. I'm not a fool." Mindfang clicks her teeth a few times, a clearly nervous behavior. "I follow the news. And-- well-- when I got a letter saying that the mother of the Signless had been presumed dead under suspicious circumstances, I did my research."

"...You were looking for me?" Rosa repeats, numbly.

"Yes. L.. I thought you might be rather interesting to meet. But I wasn't sure who you were and then you were so wonderful, so sweet and perfect and-- and-- I just couldn't bring myself to-- to make you talk about it."

There's something she's not saying. But Rosa doesn't want to press it. "But... but why?"

"You did what no one else could. You stood up to the Empire." Mindfang says, shrugging dismissively. "And I wanted to see if you were real."

"I must be such a disappointment, then." Rosa grumbles, bitterly. "You were expecting a powerful woman ready to take on the word and instead you got a broken down shell of a creature."

"No. You're brilliant." Mindfang reaches out and squeezes her hand. "And... and I don't care, either way. I want you. You're beautiful, you're passionate, you're---- wonderful. And I'm sorry that I've mistreated you."

"...Would you have kept me if I wasn't the Dolorosa?"

"Yes." Mindfang says, without waiting a second. "I don't even care if you've been lying about being a virgin. Or if you dye your hair. Or if you have a secret drug habit."

"I have none of those things."

"Excuse me?"

"I think I've been rather well deflowered, don't you think? And I think my roots would be showing by this point. And where would I get drugs on board the Widow?"

Mindfang clears her throat, delicately, and lips her teacup to her un-lipsticked lips. "Half my men are on drugs, Rosa."

"...Oh. Oh I didn't realize that."

"We're pirates, you silly woman." Mindfang scoffs, tossing her hair behind her neck. "I just-- I just love you. And I don't know how to handle that."
Rosa feels herself go bright green. She sounds like she means it, voice heavy with latent emotion. "Well. A nice start would be by remembering I'm an sentient being who can make independent decisions."

"Okay."

"And it would be rather nice if you could trust me." Rosa mumbles, feeling more than a little pained to ask it. "I'm not intending to hurt you, you know. I... I don't know if I'm in love with you--"

Mindfang tries to hide her reaction to that, but-- well-- she doesn't quite succeed. Rosa pretends not to notice the look of pained fear that rises up in her eyes. Poor thing looks like a kitten that got thrown into a bathtub for the first time by the one person she trusted.

"That's not to say that I don't feel very strongly for you." Rosa amends, quickly. "But I cannot love someone who sees me as nothing more than a pliant accessory and expects me to behave as such."

"...Okay." Mindfang mumbles, again, childishly yanking her hands out of Rosa's grasp when she moves to take them. She studiously stares at the scratches on the table.

"Do you understand what I'm telling you, Vienna?" Rosa asks, slowly. Mindfang doesn't react and Rosa slaps the table in order to get her attention. She flinches but doesn't glance up. "I care about you. More than I think I should. But I'm not comfortable with your idea that loving me means having to control me."

Mindfang throws her head back and forces out a strangled noise. Rosa's unsure which emotion she's trying to express, but it's clearly negative. She blinks repeatedly and makes several helpless hand gestures.

"That's not what this is about. You're not mad that I was being possessive. You don't believe I love you."

The question lingers on an agonized note, a desperate hope that she's been up all night worrying over nothing, that the woman standing next to her will melt all over herself to make her feel better because of course it isn't true. If Rosa were good at her job, she'd do that. She'd crawl over to her, pet her, make her feel better-- murmur affected words of love into her ear. But, the fact that she isn't good at her job is what's at stake in this argument. She came to Mindfang untrained and unbroken and she certainly hasn't done anything to change that.

Mindfang glances up from the table. The silence is dragging on, each click of the second hand on the clock like a knife to the back. Rosa meets her eyes and looks away before she can notice anything. She sinks onto the arm of the couch and stares down at her hands, the calloused hands that have gone soft with months of being nothing more than a sham of a handmaid. Her nails are perfectly smooth, small arches above perfectly clean fingers. The upholstered couch beneath her is covered in brocade and she's wearing a dress that's sewn from the finest silk. She's not hungry, but if she were, someone could have food to her in moments. And there's a beautiful woman hunkered down in front of her, so desperate to gain her affection that she brought her across an ocean just to try and make her happy. And it worked, she supposes. She's happy, she's alive, she's enjoying herself-- all those things are true. She hasn't been this happy in decades.

"I don't." Rosa says, with a tragic note of finality. She despises the words even as she breathes them out, and keeps her eyes carefully trained on the lines of battles long-past that still linger. "I think you want to love me. And I think you've convinced yourself that you do love me. But I don't think you really do."
"You're just trying to hurt me, aren't you? Because I got mad? Don't you think this is a little extreme-"

"No. No, I'm not trying to hurt you." She shrugs and folds her hands between her thighs, forcing her neck to stiffen and rise to look Mindfang in the face. "I know you care about me. Very much. And I don't doubt your affection--"

"For fuck's sake, I'm not a lapdog--"

"No. But I am."

"Don't be ridiculous. You know that's not true! How can you even say that, Rosa--"

"You like to see me happy. And you make sure someone takes care of me. And you want me to do nothing but pay attention to you." She frowns at the disgusting sneer spreading across Mindfang's face. "You just see me as something to care about, not a person. You don't regard me your equal."

"Well you aren't!" Mindfang snaps. The words are so immediate, so angry, so defensive that Rosa can't help but smile.

"I know that. I know that I'm nothing more than you're allowing me to be. And you can make all the grand gestures that you want-- the moment I leave you, the moment you cast me adrift, I will not be allowed to live."

She sighs and Mindfang growls. Her ears are twisting back at a grotesque angle and her eyes are beginning to gleam a dangerous shade. Rosa pretends it isn't happening.

"You know all there is to know about me. You're allowed to. But all I know about you-- all you've let me know-- are little scraps of things, things that any one of your transient sailors could tell me."

"That's not fair--"

"Isn't it though?" Rosa says, with a bitter laugh. "You knew everything you think there is to know about me before I even met you. And all I know is that you're a noblewoman playing at being a pirate who happens to have a penchant for good books, fine art and wine."

"You could have asked me! You could have asked me anything! How is it my fault that you don't know anything about me-- isn't that on you?"

"How, Vienna? How? When?" Rosa presses her fingers to either side of the bridge of her nose and groans. "I like you. Quite a bit. But--"

Mindfang screams into her hands. "I love you and nothing you're saying is going to change that!"

Rosa sighs. "I don't know what to tell you, Vienna. I don't think you do. Do you want me to lie to you?"

"Why can't you?" Mindfang asks, her voice small and tremulous, like there's a chance that she'll crash and burn.

"Because I don't want to hurt you!" Rosa groans, praying she won't cry because it's beginning to feel like she might. Crying isn’t going to help. At all. Crying will make Mindfang feel like she’s won and it will most certainly give her the upper hand.

Mindfang huffs and slams her hands down onto the tabletop, shaking the vase of roses sitting there.
Rosa winces at the suddenness of the noise and the idea that such a beautiful vase might have to be smashed over Mindfang’s head. "Why not!? If you don’t love me, then why does it matter?"

"Because I care about you and lying to you will just hurt you more!” Rosa shouts, all but screaming. Why is it so hard to explain this!? What isn’t she saying? There must be a magical combination of words that will make her take a deep breath and realize how ridiculous she is.

Mindfang gets to her feet. It's a quick, fluid motion and Rosa barely sees her move. It's like the sudden appearance of a spider down a windowsill, suddenly and gracefully rappelling down a line of silk. And, similarly to an unexpected spider encounter, she feels an urge to scream, hit her and run "Then why can’t you love me?"

She's glaring now, her hair slipping from her braid like it's a halo and her eyes getting threateningly intense, teeth bared and muscles shaking like she's an overworked horse.

"I don't know! I-- I just-- I can't do this!"

"Why not?" She sounds like a petulant child, asking a question that there isn’t an answer to-- why, why, why, why can’t I, why not?

"Because I don't know if I can." Rosa hisses, curling her hand around her upper arm. She digs her fingernails into her skin, the pain bringing a flicker of serenity within the vexing typhoon that her brain is turning into. She can handle pain. She knows how to handle that. But Mindfang's too quick to go along with it, reaching out and yanking her hand away so hard that her wrist snaps, the noise more painful than the action. "I just. You-- don't want me you want something that I don't know if I can give you--"

Mindfang grits her teeth and speaks slowly, each word a sharp jab of a dagger. "The fuck does that even mean?"

"I don't know if I can bring myself to-- to do all of this again and, quite frankly, I don't know if I want to--"

"When will you?!” She's trying not to cry and it's the most pathetic thing Rosa's seen. The urge to slap her fangs out of her mouth is incredibly powerful and Rosa's forced to dig her nails into her thighs to suppress it. She's upset? She's angry? She's heartbroken? What the hell does she have to be upset about? She's been getting everything she wants!

"Not until I know you get that I'm real, that I matter just as much as you-- that-- we-- I don't know-- that you respect me."

"I know but-- I worry about you-- I worry that if I let you go off you're just going to give up trying to care about me and-- I'll be left alone. You could die-- you could get hurt-- anything could go on--" She says, her voice ragged and nothing like the voice Rosa's used to hear echoing across the deck of a ship in a storm. She collapses back into her chair and keens softly. It's small and pathetic and more like the sulky intonations of a thirteen year old girl being told that she can't go out after midnight than the grumbling of a woman thwarted in love.

Rosa cuts her off with an angry hand gesture. It's her turn to talk and she's not about to lose it. It's been a hard fight to get to this and damn everything-- she's going to speak her mind.

"You're allowed to worry. I don't fault you for that. I'd be rather upset if you didn't worry after me.” Rosa presses her fingertips into her eyes and takes a deep breath through her nose. She's going to do something rash if she can't calm down. Why is this bothering her so much? What in the world is it
about this stupid, selfish woman that's making her so-- furious? "But I can't have you pushing me around and be expected to love you, too."

"But if you get hurt--" Mindfang protests, carefully ignoring the secondary statement in favor of paying attention to the more readily fixable issue of disrespect, rising a little out of her chair. Rosa hisses and she sits back down without a word more.

"Then you will patch me up and kill whoever did it." Rosa snarls, slamming back from the table with a screech of wood on wood. "Vienna. Do you want to own me or love me?"

"...Can't I have both?" She asks, bravely, and Rosa groans, forcing all the air out of her lungs with the intensity of it.

"No. No, you can't. Not if you want your feelings to be reciprocated." Rosa slips into Mindfang's lap. Mindfang wraps her arms around her waist without a word and presses her face into her shoulder. Rosa rubs her neck as Mindfang fights not to cry-- the feeling of her body trembling and her shockingly slender neck beneath her hands is keeping the worst of the rage at bay. "Do you want me to love you?"

Mindfang nods, her forehead rubbing against the skin of her shoulder with an uncomfortable clamminess. "Yes." Her voice is strained and almost inaudible, but it's a yes all the same.

"Then you can't be so mean. And if I feel like going for a walk and then decide on a whim to dye my skin neon pink along the way, I have every right to."

She makes a choked noise of disapproval. "Oh fuck no, please don't do that Rosa-- Just-- do anything else but don't do that--"

"I'm not going to do that. That's just an example of what I can do if I feel like it. Just like if you wake up and decide you want to cut off your hair, get elaborate facial tattoos and abandon your career as a pirate to become an office clerk, I will be forced to accept that."

"If I ever do that, you have my permission to leave me." Mindfang mutters, rolling her eyes and making a dismissive click with her tongue.

Rosa slaps her. Not very hard, but enough that she squawks like an angry chicken. She rubs her hand over the faint splotch of blue on her cheekbone-- oh goodness does she have a beautiful face-- and raises her eyebrows. "I don't need your permission to leave you."

"Well. You have my blessing then." Mindfang nuzzles into her hand plaintively and, before Rosa can react, nips at her knuckles ever-so-softly. Rosa's face twitches into a smile before she can stop herself and Mindfang smiles back, hesitantly.

"I'm... Sorry. I didn't mean to disrespect you." Mindfang mutters, squeezing her. "I will do my best to treat you better in the future. Because I am in love with you."

Rosa rests her forehead against Mindfang's. She's cold but Rosa's getting used to that and the smell of her perfume is enough to bring her down off her angry high for a few moments. "There. Now was that so hard?"

"...You're going to be a bitch about this aren't you?" Mindfang mutters, rolling her eyes. "Fine. Fine, whatever."

"Well, you get to be a bitch about everything all the time so I'll be a bitch about this one thing some of the time."
"You've got sass." Mindfang tries to kiss her. She turns away and huffs, anxiously. Mindfang attaches herself to her neck instead. "I like it."

"I'm still mad."

"I know."

"You're going to need to make this up to me somehow." Rosa says, laughing, the sound awkward in the face of the tension between them.

"I know." Mindfang winces, glancing up from Rosa's neck. "So what's it going to be?"

"It? Singular? You're assuming that one thing is going to pacify me?"

"Rosa, please please don't make this so hard." Mindfang looks like she's going to start crying again. "I'm no good at being romantic."

Rosa pats her on the cheek condescendingly. Mindfang yelps a little, unhappily. "You've done perfectly well so far, haven't you?"

"Should I start with dinner and pray you don't take revenge on me while we're at the best restaurant in the city?"

"Didn't we go there already?"

"No, we went to my favorite restaurant in the city. Tonight I'm going to take you to the nicest one. The one with a four month reservation list and a wine cellar the size of the Widow's hold." Mindfang doesn't sound particularly happy about this. She's not much of a society woman and, undoubtedly, this is the place of highest society on whatever island they're on. "You'd like it because black tie is mandatory and you can't show your shoulders or too much cleavage without being rejected as common rabble."

Rosa does like that fact. So she smiles, sweetly, and kisses Mindfang's forehead. "I'll leave you to your bribery, then."

"Where are you going?" Mindfang asks, sharply, and Rosa groans.

But instead of bludgeoning her, she keeps walking out of the room. "To put on several thousand dollars' worth of lingerie I bought this afternoon."

Mindfang groans, dropping her head onto the table with a loud 'thunk' and the tangling of her horns in the flower arrangement. "I'm going to regret pissing you off, aren't I?"

She trails her fingers across the doorway and gives Mindfang her best disparaging stare. "Don't you already?"

"Yes." Mindfang mutters, a little more sadly that Rosa expected. "I do. But you came back so I guess it's sort of worth it?"

She's right. It sort of is.

* * *

Mindfang is, of course, successful in getting a table. By the time six o’clock rolls around they’re both dressed, Mindfang with the help of a stray ladies’ maid and Rosa with the assistance of a very gallant Marcus.
Mindfang comes to collect her this time instead of waiting like a jaguar in the lobby. She knocks and- shockingly-- waits for Marcus to get the door instead of waltzing inside.

Rosa doesn't even pretend that she's unaware of how good she looks in her new dress and is grateful that she chose to wear it despite her more modest sensibilities. Mostly because Mindfang cannot stop staring.

Mindfang swallows a few times-- one, two, three times Rosa watches her neck bob. Her earrings shake a little beneath the sapphire encrusted headband that's secured in her coiffure. Rosa likes the nervousness.

She looks nice with her hair pulled up like that, like she's some sort of goddess missing from the flow of time. It shows off her neck to perfection and Rosa has to resist the urge to go for the jugular.

"Where the hell did you get a dress like that?" Mindfang is doing an awful job at pretending that she's not shocked. This is fun, Rosa realizes. This is very fun. Startling her by looking pretty. Should she be offended by that?

No. No, she doesn't need to be. Mindfang knows full well how beautiful she is. The thought that she's beautiful makes Rosa stand up a little taller. She hasn't thought that about herself since heaven knows. But she feels pretty now, with Mindfang trying not to beam up at her like a lighthouse with suppressed excitement.

"The same place I got the underwear I'm wearing," Rosa replies, smartly, stepping into her heels. They're taller than usual but they feel good on her feet. She hasn't worn shoes like this since she was sixteen. It feels... nice to look pretty and young and sort of... sexy.

No. Definitely sexy. She eyes herself in the mirror. There's black lace, with just a hint of gold covering the skin from her sternum to the slightest 'V' of her cleavage, keeping the gaping V of the black silk just a little modest. There's the barest hint of lace covering her shoulders and-- all in all-- she looks perversely modest. Except for the bare skin of her breasts gleaming through the lace and the cling of the fabric to her waist and hips. And the fact that she's wearing four inch heels. Aside from all of those things she looks modest.

That and, well, the fact that anyone who cares to look closely enough will be able to pick out the protuberance of rings where her nipples are. That might also be a factor in place ruining the demure nun look.

She's only wearing gold rings in her ears and-- aside from what's going on beneath the dress-- not a thing is blue.

"Do you want to take a shawl?" Mindfang prods, slowly, getting to her feet. She is actually dressed appropriately for the occasion, wearing an evening gown sewn from the finest of black velvet that's got a simple neckline and a slit going up just far enough to be dangerous without losing propriety. She's got a gorgeous lace stole hanging from her elbows and her shoes are just the color of her blood. She's the one looking demure for once, instead of Rosa-- her lipstick is red, but the muted red of a good house claret instead of a wildfire and her eye makeup is, for once, something regarding sane.

When she finally puts a bookmark into her book and gets to her feet, still giving Rosa an incredulous once-over, Rosa's surprised to see that she is-- in fact-- taller than her.

Well. She always is but, in this case, Mindfang's heels aren't enough to repair the difference in height like they usually do. It's almost comical, really, seeing her tilt her head back ever-so-slightly to meet
Rosa's eyes.

She likes it. A lot.

"You look like a panther." Mindfang says, simply, as she reaches up to trace her fingers—painted red—over Rosa's collarbones. "Should I be afraid?"

Rosa purrs into her touch and Mindfang's pride seems somewhat soothed. "Perhaps. I do bite, you know."

"That's what I thought." Mindfang pats her cheek and gives her a final once-over, this time carefully taking in every inch of her body. It makes Rosa feel far smaller, somehow. "You're missing something."

Her fingers linger at Rosa's bare neck, significantly. She narrows her eyes and mouths blue like Rosa's going to immediately react and be absolutely taken aback by it.

"No. No, I don't think so." Rosa arches an eyebrow in a challenge. Mindfang looks perfectly miffed as Rosa turns on her heel and swans towards the door. "We're going to be late if you don't hurry up."

Mindfang doesn't follow until she's at the elevators, about to press the button. She's still staring at Rosa like this is an uncomfortable blind date that they show up to and realize that they dated once twenty years ago.

She's holding a pendant in her hand and makes a half-hearted gesture to shove it into Rosa's hands. To her credit, it is one of Rosa's favorites (not that she's ever mentioned that to her), an uncut sapphire wrapped in a thick gold band and dangling from a gossamer-thin chain. "You have to wear my color."

"No I don't. We're not betrothed. Or at all committed." Rosa stretches her neck from side to side. There's still silver marks there from where she wore her collar for all those months, not to mention the color on her wrists and ankles. Mindfang stares then narrows her eyes.

Her voice is like a far-off storm when she finally speaks. "Rosa--"

The elevator dings, loudly. She shoves open the wrought-iron gate and it clangs, ominously. The doors roll back with a perfectly oiled mechanism.

"You're going to have to earn that right back, now aren't you?" Rosa says, sharply, ushering Mindfang into the elevator.

"...Please don't do this." Mindfang mumbles, into her cleavage. Rosa sighs.

"Do what?"

Mindfang tries once again to make her take the necklace. It isn't remarkably successful because Rosa keeps her hands straight against her thighs. "Hurt me more than you have to."

"This has nothing to do with hurting you and far more with gaining back my own self-worth. If I wanted to hurt you, I'd smack you with a teapot." Rosa reaches up and tucks a stray curl behind her ear and Mindfang hurries to nuzzle into her fingertips. She doesn't look happy, but she sure as hell accepts the peace offering.

"...Point well-taken." Mindfang says, grudgingly. But she still looks like she got rained on. Rosa
sighs through her nose and yanks the necklace from her hand. The chain is long enough that when she pulls it on, the stone nestles between her breasts, just out of sight.

"Happy now?" Yes, she is, she's smiling like a hungry fox who just spotted a crippled nightingale. "I'm not going to run off with the first pair of boobs I see coming at me."

She walks out of the elevator and, as she crosses the lobby, is gratified to see how many heads turn to stare. Mindfang follows, reaching out and taking Rosa by the elbow.

Mindfang looks pleased. For about a minute. "...Wait that only applies to half of the population, Rosa."

"Well. That means you only have half the population to fend off, doesn't it?" She shakes the hair out of her eyes with a soft flick of her neck. The bellhop is staring at her as she strikes past him and Rosa smiles a little longer than she needs to, making eye contact. Mindfang is quick to snarl.

"Rosa don't you dare." She hisses, grabbing her by the elbow and yanking her close.

Rosa smiles. "Well. If you're going to be jealous I might as well give you a reason."

"This is how people die, Rosa. This is how people end up getting hit over the head with an aquarium, tied up and shipped across seas to spice markets and end up as illegal immigrants."

"Those things are completely different, I hope you realize that."

"Well. You seem kind of like the type of woman who would be sort of pissed if I actually murdered someone--"

"What would give you that idea."

"Is that what I'm doing wrong? Not killing anyone for you? Because I can do that. I can totally do that." Mindfang lowers her voice as a car pulls up.

She's never been in a car before. Rosa knows what a car is; she's naive, not stupid. She has not, however, been inside of one. Mindfang gives the car a disgusted look as the bellhop rushes to pull the door open.

"I asked for a carriage." She grumbles, glowering at the car's interior. "I hate cars. Just. Hate them."

Rosa raises an eyebrow and, without waiting, slips inside. The car smells like new fur and fresh leather. "It looks nice enough." Rosa settles herself in, crossing her legs. "Why are you so upset?"

"Technology will be the downfall of society. I hate it. Can't we just use candles and horses? What's wrong with horses. I like horses."

"You sound like a grumpy old woman."

"I am a grumpy old woman!" Mindfang snarls and follows her inside, flopping down like a sack of potatoes that's morally offended by the fact that they're in something that has an engine. "I like old things. Nice old things. I barely even tolerate having a generator on the Widow."

"Oh dear. I won't even ask about indoor plumbing."

"I'm traditional, not a heathen." Mindfang grumbles, closing her eyes and wrinkling her nose. "Just. Don't talk. Please. I get car sick."
"I don't mind a bit of technology if it's going to make my life easier." Rosa murmurs, running her hands over the softness of the leather beneath her. The car begins to move before Rosa has a chance to realize it. She feels the sudden shift as the car moves forward and she shifts backwards ever so slightly.

"I haaaaaaaaate this." Mindfang groans, slumping against Rosa. "I am not going to tip anyone."

"Vienna. Be reasonable." This is uncomfortable, she realizes, quickly. That's what she's doing. They're both tense and uncomfortable and this is something they can talk about without anger, without controversy. Mindfang gets carsick—that's a fact. And she can grandstand about that for hours, possibly, both of them pretending they're perfectly fine.

"No. No I won't be reasonable until we're out of this fucking death trap. I hate hate hate the fact that we're replacing everything with fake things. Oh, too much work to go around policing the nation? Let's make robots do it! Honestly, spaceships are one thing but cars? Really? What's next, replacing unwanted body parts with electronic models?!

Rosa rolls her eyes and prods Mindfang in the knee with the tip of her shoe. She caterwauls and tries to squirm away. She was not, apparently, lying about getting carsick; she looks absolutely awful in a way that demands she be carried back to their hotel suite and tucked up in bed with some hot tea. "Hush. You're getting fanatical."

She makes a furious noise and presses her face into Rosa's shoulder. "Don't talk to me until we get there or I'm going to vomit all over your dress."

"..." She has nothing to say to that. So instead she helps Mindfang stretch out across her lap and covers her with her shawl. It's not much of a compromise to be kind to a sick woman and, well, Mindfang is a bit more tolerable when incapacitated.

The rest of their trip is conducted, as requested, in silence. Rosa begins to understand Mindfang's objections when the smell of gasoline begins to get overpowering, but she must admit that the ride is far smoother than in a carriage, not to mention they make it across the city in half the time and without any equine screaming when something unexpected happens.

Mindfang isn't suffering enough to be aware of the car arriving at the restaurant. The moment it begins to slow she's sitting up and grumbling at Rosa to fix her hair.

They're slipping out of the car after a matter of seconds has passed. Mindfang does, of course, tip the driver, but doesn't hesitate to tell him how much she hates his career choice. Rosa heads her off by trailing her hand across her lower back, just a little too close to her ass to be platonic.

That shuts her up rather abruptly. Her rant dies off mid-sentence as she inhales sharply and stops talking. It only takes ten seconds for Mindfang to have an arm around her waist, squeezing tightly and pulling her into her side.

The restaurant looks like a museum; it's facade is carved with countless flowers and cherubs that gleam in the light of oil lamps placed strategically along the sidewalk. The glass in the front doors is entirely blacked out and there's a rather intimidating man keeping guard.

He takes one look at Mindfang and opens the door wordlessly. Mindfang doesn't seem at all surprised by this and swans in, ushering Rosa along. The inside of the restaurant, however, doesn't look a thing like a museum. It's dark, lit only by the candles on tables and a few lamps along the busboy's stations. The concierge is a rather petite woman with horns that rather dwarf her head but Rosa's too polite to notice that. She's also rather distracted by the forbidding sneer that seems to be
glued onto her face, judging by the lines beaten into her skin.

Mindfang strides up to her, utterly unphased by this. Probably because her own sneer is exponentially better. She places her clutch on the concierge’s podium without missing a beat and, instead of saying anything, raises an eyebrow.

This, Rosa thinks, is not the best way to get a good table. It is probably a very good way to get kicked out on the street and ensure that they end up retreating to the hotel to eat room service in the same room that they just spent the better part of yesterday ruining their relationship in.

But, of course, Rosa is wrong about this. It only takes the concierge a single glance to identify Mindfang. She pulls out a pair of menus and a wine list from the hidden recesses of her desk and they’re striding across the restaurant without a single word being spoken. The whole place is a legacy to an age free of technology, candles everywhere, paintings on the wall and absolutely everyone dressed to appear in high society. Rosa shuffles in close to Mindfang, tugging at her stole. She wordlessly slips her arm around Rosa’s and pulls her close. Mindfang’s just a little too tall to comfortably rest her head on Rosa’s shoulder but she tries to anyways, to near disastrous attempt when her horn gets a little too close to her eye.

Getting to their table appears to be a godlike task; they’re guided around tables packed with trolls of all shapes and sizes, not to mention colors—although the vast majority of them are on the decidedly cooler spectrum—and Rosa’s not sure she’ll be able to find her way out.

They’re taken to one of the side rooms and then led to the back wall, where a line booths stand. Each one looks to be upholstered in black suede and shaped like sharply angled ‘C’s. They have one of the corner ones, just far enough out of the way that they won’t be disturbed by the other diners but not quite entirely in shadows where they’ll be forgotten by a less-than-stellar waiter. The table is lit only by a single candle and the ivory linen of the tablecloth is perfectly pressed without a stain in sight. The china is elegant, the crystal ware pristine and the silverware has a mirror polish. Everything is exactly as it should be and she likes it.

If the whole slave thing doesn’t work out she might have to work here. Provided she isn’t dead.

"I hope this suits your needs, Marquise." The concierge has a delicate voice, like hair-thin blown glass that's just been removed from the glassblower's tube. It's completely at odds with her austere presentation and Rosa struggles not to smile.

"What do you think?" Mindfang murmurs, squeezing Rosa's hip. "Is this okay?"

Why does she have to make decisions all of a sudden? Is this Mindfang's idea of being respectful? Ugh. She doesn't like it. Well... she does, but, not right now. "It's perfect, thank you. I apologize that someone is picky."

Mindfang makes a face. Rosa mimics her. The concierge tries not to smile and fails.

"She knows what she wants." The concierge murmurs, softly, as Rosa takes her seat across from Mindfang. "There's hardly anything wrong with that, ma'am."

She hands Rosa the wine list and walks away. The concierge is out of sight before Rosa realizes that she's being glowered at. She glances up from the extensive list of wines to curiously meet Mindfang's gaze. She looks absolutely mortified, like someone just presented her with pictures of herself doing naked calisthenics in a library.

No. No, she would actually do that. She looks like someone just gave her proof that she misspelled
something in a letter to Dualscar. It takes Rosa a few seconds to process what happened and then she has to fight not to laugh.

"She was talking to me about you, wasn't she." Rosa murmurs, slowly. "Well. That's... something new."

Mindfang's face is burning and she drops her head onto her arms, folded on the table. "I feel very emasculated right now."

"You’re a woman, Vienna." Rosa says, turning the page and examining the options. Everything is very expensive, has an unpronounceable name and ingredients she's never heard of. Good.

"Really, Rosa? Really? I hadn't noticed. Wow, I had no idea that I am not, in fact, a man." Her voice is harsher than it needs to be-- her anger is disproportionate to the slight and Rosa’s sure if this were any other night she’d laugh it off and tease Rosa about having to pay now.

"Would you sulk less if I let you come over here and be obnoxiously domineering and read the menu to me?" Rosa asks. Mindfang is shoving her over in seconds, snuggling into her left side. They move in far enough that it's almost impossible to see them from anywhere but directly in front of their little alcove, which she appreciates. Mindfang drapes her arms around Rosa's shoulders but Rosa stops her at the 'pulling her into her lap' stage because that's just tacky in a quality restaurant.

The restaurant serves a full course dinner, eight courses in all. It is a proper, formal dinner and Rosa is ecstatic enough that, for the entirety of the time she spends deciding what to order, she doesn't spare a single thought to how difficult it is to pretend that there is absolutely no tension between them. Mindfang watches her with a condescending smile, fidgeting with her hair.

They order or-- rather-- Rosa, overwhelmed, lets Mindfang order dinner all at once, only weighting in on the cheese, fish and dessert because those are the only concise decisions she can make.

The moment their waiter is gone, they’re left in quiet that, for a few minutes, is comfortable. But Rosa can't let quiet be quiet-- she can feel how taught Mindfang’s muscles are, like the strings of a violin being tuned by a novice.

"You don't need to worry, you know." Rosa murmurs, the words stiff and formal as she pronounces them and she has a moment of deja-vu back to the first night they met, Mindfang towering over her like an assassin appearing out of the shadows and deciding to taunt her before acting.

"Worry about what?"

"Well. I might not be in love with you yet but I don't know how I'd be happy without you. And if I wanted to leave you I would have."

Mindfang snorts, as if to say that this is an absolutely ludicrous idea.

"Vienna-- I didn't want to bring this up and it's probably not in my best interest but-- I managed to evade the might of the entire imperial legion/might of the imperial legion and am probably responsible for slaying a few hundred of them, at the least. What in the world would stop me from leaving you?"

"You can't swim and we've been in the middle of the ocean and are currently on a small island with only two well-guarded ports?" She grumbles, not meeting Rosa's eyes.

"I've faced worse odds and won." Rosa says, smugly, giving Mindfang her best haughty stare. "But the point remains. I have made the decision to stay and have yet to change my mind."
Mindfang frowns. "I'd prefer for you to stay because you love me."

"Can't you be happy that I'm deciding to stay because I care very deeply for you and enjoy your company?" Rosa tries, tiredly.

"...I'd be more happy if it were my thing." She's not completely comforted, but she seems marginally more pacified. They both fall silent once more, but Mindfang's squeezing her a little less tightly and has begun to slump against her.

Perhaps she isn't being entirely fair. Perhaps she should try to explain what she means when she says she can't say she loves her. She should explain herself, offer Mindfang some sort of solace, try to appease her. But if she's wrong, then she's done nothing but give her a false hope and that's even worse to think about. The unspoken question that she-- and Mindfang-- must have is how the deep, intense affection Rosa has for her is different from love but she can't answer that. She knows what it's like to love someone, the unerring, unshakeable loyalty, the need to shelter and protect and defend to your last breath and-- well-- that isn't what she has here, sitting half asleep in a fancy restaurant. They have something different. Rosa can't say what but she doesn't think it's love.

At least it probably isn't.

"I just. I don't want to lose you over this." Rosa says, tiredly, rubbing at her eyes. "And don't tell me that I can't lose you since you own me because that isn't going to help right now."

"...I won't wait forever." Mindfang mutters, after a painful pause. "But... I—I have time. And damnit all a member of the Serket family doesn't give up this easily."

"Good." Rosa mumbles, her face flushing as she says it. She covers her face with her hands and stares at the tablecloth as her words come out in a rush-- "I don't want you to."

Mindfang says nothing, but when she kisses Rosa's cheek and says something, absently, about the art on the walls, it's an acknowledgement that they'll pretend nothing is wrong and place the problem on the shelf for another day.

"Um. So do you want to tell me about evading the Imperial Army?" Mindfang says, awkwardly, keeping her voice low because she's a pirate, not a simpleton. "Because that... that sounds... interesting."

It is an awful attempt at initiating a conversation. But Rosa takes the olive branch, giving Mindfang a soft, grateful smile.

* * *

Conversations about her years spent evading the army takes them through the first two courses, by the end of which they've both had enough wine to relax a little more. Mindfang has kicked off her shoes beneath the table and is attempting to persuade Rosa that it isn't the worst breach of protocol possible, to no avail.

"It's just not seemly," Rosa grumbles, rolling her eyes as Mindfang gestures dramatically with her fork. "What if there's a fire?"

"Last thing on my mind is going to be my shoes, Pet." Mindfang laughs, instinctively shaking her head to toss hair back that isn't there. It's something Rosa's seen her do countless times, whenever her hair is anything but free and bountiful, and it never ceases to lose its charm.

"Look pet, on a scale of one to ten, one being showing up dressed like a nun wearing a veil and shit
and ten being having sex on the table, taking my shoes off is probably like a two. No one can see anything that goes on beneath the tablecloth. Seriously. No one."

Rosa is less than convinced. But she doesn’t continue the argument about her shoes because, well, Mindfang does have a good point.

The fourth course has them exuberantly arguing the practice of giving family pets the same sort of names one would give a fully-grown troll, and whether or not it’s acceptable to name your springer spaniel after your great-great-great ancestor. Mindfang doesn’t think so and is valiantly attempting to explain something about historical revisionism that makes very little sense to Rosa (she’s over half a bottle in, Mindfang can’t expect so much) but Rosa’s doing her best to stubbornly maintain the opinion that she would feel blatantly uncomfortable owning a cat named Maryam because she’d feel silly calling after a cat using her own name.

"No, Rosa, they’re dead. You don’t use your own name, I mean you’d use their first name. Like... Asriel or... I don’t know... Rodrek? Marisa?" Mindfang doesn’t appear to know any names off the top of her head.

Mindfang refills her wine glass without asking and Rosa gratefully begins to work on emptying it again. "Are you honestly telling me you’d name a dog after your ancestor?"

"Well, she was kind of a bitch so..." Mindfang trails off, cackling to herself.

Rosa laughs harder than she needs to, slumping against Mindfang. She supports her, of course, keeping her from crashing into their fish course. "You’re so warm," Mindfang mumbles, awed, shivering as Rosa rubs a hand up and down her exposed arm. Her stole was abandoned to the far end of the booth long ago and she is decidedly cold. Rosa keeps running her fingers up and down Mindfang’s arm even after they’ve changed subjects, moving on to Mindfang trying to teach her about poetry and failing, miserably.

Part of her failure might stem from the fact that, every time Rosa’s fingers brush past her elbow her breath hitches a little and she momentarily loses her train of thought. "You’re being a tease, Rosa." Mindfang grumbles, finally batting her hand away and distracting her with a covert kiss. "Stop it."

Rosa is less than satisfied with the short duration of the kiss and goes in for another. Mindfang growls but is still smiling as she willingly continues the encounter.

"I should cut you off," Mindfang whispers when Rosa pulls away, tracing her fingers over the base of Mindfang’s horn while on her way to straighten a few stray curls. "You get handsy when you’re drunk."

Rosa sniffs. "I have standards, Vienna. I'm not abandoning them just because I'm intoxicated."

"We'll see about that." Mindfang mutters, rolling her eyes. "Four courses to go. I bet you won't make it past the next one without us needing to find some privacy."

"I'm offended." Rosa grumbles and, as was probably the intention, she ceases her amorous attentions. It's not as difficult as it would normally be because as grateful as she is for the stalemate, she's still a little miffed. "I went almost fifty years living in absolute chastity, don't assume I can't do it again."

Mindfang gasps, horrified, her face screwed up in an expression of comic horror. "Now, now,
“darling, let's not do anything extreme.”

"We'll see," Rosa murmurs sipping from her wineglass and glaring a little. "But I'm still insulted."

* * *

She is decidedly less insulted by the time they begin the seventh course. Between the two of them they've put back a bottle and a half of wine and that was with Mindfang switching to harder liquor halfway through.

Mindfang is absolutely correct, of course. The more she drinks the more inclined she is to get... affectionate. Which isn't the worst effect alcohol could have on her, she supposes. Mindfang certainly doesn't seem to mind the nuzzling and the handholding. The sober part of her brain is informing her that this is a little cruel, considering she just told her that she's not in love but--

That doesn't mean that she's not attractive or that Rosa's not incredibly fond of her and all that she brings into their... relationship.

She settles into Mindfang's side, tucking her feet up on the seat beside her. Consuming wine is a nice thing. Mindfang's half-conscious beside her, slumped against the booth with her eyes shut, sated on good food, good wine and even better liquor. She's clutching her coffee cup as if it were a Faberge egg, something incredibly precious that should not be touched but, due to her neurotic tendencies, can't put it down because it's sparkly and instead has decided to adopt it and raise it as her heir.

Rosa can't help but feel proud. Not of Mindfang, of course. Mindfang is not going to be getting any compliments for a while. But she's proud of herself for being able to wrangle her attention. From this angle, head resting against Mindfang's shoulder, she can only make out the barest hint of a profile, the sculpture of her nose and the beautiful curvature of her eyelashes lying against her silver-gray skin and, of course, the sumptuous gleam of her red lipstick.

She smells like dessert. Not in that she smells like food, but in that she smells like she could be eaten. Devoured, really. The smell of jasmine is faint but still delectable and-- well-- it's hard to be this close to her and not be all over her. At least now that she's drunk, of course. An hour ago she would have been perfectly happy to be quietly disdainful across the table. But, half a bottle of wine in and working on a glass of something so delicious it has to be terribly high in alcohol content, she doesn't give a flying fuck about being withholding. She just wants to do inappropriate things.

But that would be absolutely unacceptable. Rosa shifts, slightly and finishes off her drink. The corpses of their cheese course are scattered across the table before them, the rind of some delicious sheep's cheese, a couple of missed almonds-- some honey about which they'd debated the purpose of.

There's probably a dessert course on its way. Or, well, there's going to be one once their waitress returns. But for now they're on a tiny little island of their own, existing together in a suspended silence. Normally, Rosa would not mind this at all. But, well, in this current moment she's feeling sort of drunk. Not just on alcohol but on confidence which is a rather unique experience. Mindfang's too afraid to upset her, the concierge and the waitress both assumed she was the dominant partner in their relationship, not to mention she knows she looks great. She needs to take advantage of this.

Somehow.

Rosa feels something twitch. Something that should be better contained but, for the moment, isn't at all. She's new at the whole 'being open about having a libido' thing. Rosa shifts a little closer to Mindfang, setting her glass on the table. Mindfang makes a noise over the rim of her coffee cup that
conveys the fact that she's listening but is actually mostly asleep.

She trails her fingers over Mindfang's arm and then drops her hand into her lap. This does not garner her attention either beyond a soft trill of acknowledgement.

Rosa trails her fingers down Mindfang's thigh with long, leisurely strokes. The velvet of her dress is exhilarating beneath her touch, like she's petting a particularly lovely kitten. Velvet, Rosa realizes, is one of her favorite things. Especially when Mindfang is wearing it. Rosa keeps petting her and savors the feeling of Mindfang's skin twitching beneath her touch, the warmth of solid muscle and just the right amount of flesh.

She rolls her wrist around to rub the velvet against the grain along her knuckles then soothes it down with her palm. The sensation makes her shiver. That is nice, very nice. She likes that. The contrast is exhilarating and she does it again, just for fun. Then she stops. Her brain is beginning to go places it shouldn't and, well, she doesn't know how she's going to handle that place in this place.

However, she is a little too drunk to think about that right now, so instead of putting her hands back onto the table where they belong, exposed to the light of day. She doesn't do that. Instead, she curls her fingers into Mindfang's thigh, the heel of her palm pressing against the bare skin revealed by the slit of her dress.

The press of skin on skin makes her immediately dart her hand away. And then put it back just as quickly because it felt nice to touch her. Just a little. She lets her hand slip down her thigh, just low enough that her fingertips are pressing against bare skin. Mindfang's skin is cold, but no colder than usual so Rosa pays it little heed. What matters is the fact that, when she touches her, she can feel how inherently different they are, like a mountain and sand dunes, one worn down from the other by the forces of wind, tide and time. One soft and warmed by the sun and the other cold and firm but still, along the western ridge where the sun hits most, there's a lush glen where animals flock to graze.

It's nice to feel separate from her. After so many years converting herself to make everyone else happy, doing what she needed to make everyone else happy, she's finally got a chance to breathe. She likes the trepidatious sense of self she's begun to forge, the metal still soft from the fire and still hours away from being tempered, but still on its way.

She presses her fingers into Mindfang's thigh, this time with intention. There's just enough padding there that she can feel her fingertips sink in like she's being welcomed. Mindfang opens an eye and, glancing down, proceeds to arch a brow. "What are you up to, Pet?"

"Thinking about how great I am." Rosa says, blithely, shaking her hair back and slipping her fingers beneath Mindfang's dress to curl her fingers around the angles of her bare kneecap. Mindfang shifts a little and takes in a sharp breath, but doesn't move to shove her away.

"Well. At least we can agree on that." Mindfang mutters, leaning towards Rosa a little.

It's nice keeping herself to herself. She taps her fingers against Mindfang's knee in a burst of staccato energy. But she's also glad to have someone to share that with. Someone who doesn't seem to care that she's an anxious, broken woman completely oblivious of the ways of the world. It's nice.

But it's even nicer to touch her. Rosa flattens her hand and, ever so timidly, moves her palm up Mindfang's thigh. Her skin is nothing like the velvet of her dress; it's cold, but not like ice or metal but in an incredibly living way. She doesn't feel clammy or wrong, just a little chilly and Rosa likes it.

Her skin generates an unexpected friction against Rosa's palm and she wonders at it, the unique
warmth of a pair of bodies meeting intimately. She wants to pull Mindfang into her arms and cling to her and feel her breathe.

She drags her hand in lazy patterns across Mindfang’s leg, her fingers never broaching the no-woman’s zone of her inner thigh. If she goes there, she’s not sure how things are going to progress, nor is she entirely sure of what to do if she goes there. But she doesn’t necessarily care about that yet because it feels nice just to touch her.

"My my. Someone’s getting a little affectionate." Mindfang purrs, not sounding entirely displeased. Rosa laughs meeting her eye sideways. No, she sounds incredibly pleased. Rosa shifts closer and digs her fingernails into the flesh of Mindfang’s thigh. Mindfang lets out a surprised gasp that sounds remarkably girlish and makes to shove her hand away but stops short of actually shoving.

Rosa ignores this in favor of nuzzling into Mindfang’s shoulder—oh, fine her cleavage—and then goes for her neck. She has a lovely neck for kissing and, with her hair pulled up, it’s remarkably easy to access. Rosa breathes her in, the warm smell of living skin and the poignant remnants of her perfume, and proceeds to see just what she can do to her Mistress.

Mindfang makes a valiant effort to ignore what is going on. She sips her coffee a few times, her fingers wrapped so tightly around the cup that her knuckles are going blue with the strain. Her arms have gone as stiff as a mainmast and might as well be made of oak as Rosa uses them for leverage to get higher on Mindfang’s body.

The drag of her lips against Mindfang’s neck is fascinatingly different than the resistance of her fingers against her thigh. She likes it. Mindfang seems rather noncommittal about the situation, which isn’t really at all gratifying. Rosa hisses a little against her neck and pricks her skin gently with her eyeteeth. This finally elicits a sudden jerk of her arms and the immediate deposit of her coffee cup on the table top. Rosa takes the victory and keeps going, steadily working her way up from her collarbone to her jaw. There’s a few places that make Mindfang twitch, but she doesn’t find anything useful until she sneaks behind her ear, just at the point where neck gives way to the roundness of skull.

The moment her breath brushes against the unprotected skin, Mindfang’s face goes absolutely blank, a calculated expression of indifference taking the place of her previously uncomfortable one. But her breath betrays her, coming in sharply and her hands, previously folded on the tabletop, immediately fall to her lap.

"Don’t," Mindfang warns, her voice husky and awkwardly sharp as Rosa presses her face into Mindfang’s hair. "Don’t you dare Rosa--"

She does dare. That’s an awful pronunciation to make to a woman determined to do something dramatic. She presses her lips against the tender patch of skin, her free hand sneaking up around Mindfang’s neck to hold her in place. Mindfang’s reaction is instant and wonderfully visceral. She moans through gritted teeth and desperately tries to shove her away, hands pressing into her stomach. She’s too distracted to put forth too much effort and ends up fisting her hands on the silk of Rosa’s dress instead.

Rosa just moves in closer, pressing herself against Mindfang and proceeding to explore the private part of her neck. Mindfang moans again and drops her head back, her muscles going soft.

"What the fuck are you doing?" She asks, hazily, her voice shaky. "Rosa, I told you not to drink so much-- you always do this--"
Rosa pulls away from her neck regretfully and forces Mindfang to face her. It's an awkward angle to work her hand but, well, her other is still happily occupied with stroking Mindfang's thigh which, under her ministrations, is gradually beginning to warm.

Rosa kisses her like she's drunk (which she is), her teeth scraping against her lower lip and her tongue missing Mindfang's mouth on her first attempt. Mindfang is quick to compensate, however, and she's pretty sure she's excused for a bit of sloppiness.

"Shut up." She hisses, breaking away just enough to form the words. Mindfang makes a growly noise and Rosa responds in kind.

Her hand steadily creeps up Mindfang's thigh until she can feel the jut of her hipbone, a small crest in the expanse of soft skin. The fabric of her dress, thankfully, has enough give to accommodate her hand because, well, she'd hate to ruin a perfectly nice dress. Stains come out but ripped fabric is a bit harder to hide.

She drags her hand back down her leg, scraping her fingernails down her skin even harder. Mindfang gasps, again and then shifts, anxiously, in her seat.

Her skin is becoming remarkably responsive, shuddering like angry waves under her touch. Rosa grins and Mindfang meets her eyes with the stare of a woman just put on trial for a crime she didn't commit and can't fathom why this is happening to her. It's... a nice look. Rosa would like to see it a little more often. And she's reasonably sure she knows how to go about doing that right now.

Still staring Mindfang straight in the eyes, she slides her hand to the left just a few inches. The moment she grasps Mindfang's inner thigh, fingers sinking into the remarkably pliant flesh halfway between her nook and her knee, Mindfang goes almost white and lets out a plaintive keen.

"What are you doing." She hisses, crossing her legs. That would have been more effective about five minutes ago, before she got started. As things are, her hand is just trapped. "Get away from there!"

Rosa shoves her leg back down with force she didn't realize she possessed. Mindfang yelps a little but doesn't formally protest. As she moves her hand steadily closer to her end goal Mindfang's skin is getting unnaturally warm but in a nice way, a way that she automatically associates with sex.

"Rosa for the love of fuck we are in public don't you dare--" She's whispering heatedly, glancing around her furtively like someone's going to see what's going on. But, as she so intelligently pointed out-- no one can see anything under the tablecloth. It falls almost to the floor and, where they are, provides the perfect cover.

Rosa kisses her again. This time Mindfang groans, audibly, and wrests back some control, kissing Rosa into a state that somewhat resembles quiescence. Her hand stills its progress for a few seconds. Mindfang kisses her until they're both out of breath. Rosa can smell the wine on her breath and Mindfang can probably smell the same and the knowledge that they're both more than a little drunk is intoxicating.

"Aren't you always telling me to be more adventurous?" Rosa breathes. Mindfang does not look amused and rolls her eyes.

She presses her face into Rosa's neck and snorts. "I'm always telling you not to kill yourself, not become an exhibitionist."

Rosa shrugs, letting out a moan of her own as Mindfang curls a possessive hand around her ribcage and surreptitiously cops a feel. She is not, however, at all dissuaded, and keeps moving forward.
Mindfang squirms and digs her fingers into her ribs. It's a little harder now that she's got some weight on her and it's a nice thing to feel. "Rosa I swear to fuck I am going to punch you-- this is indecent."

Rosa blinks at her and smiles. And then moves her hand closer and closer and closer, until her knuckles are brushing against her nook and Mindfang’s fallen forward on her elbows, her face hidden in her hands as she unsuccessfully attempts to stay quiet. Rosa's fingers twitch with the effort it takes to keep from moving any closer. "Says the woman not wearing underwear?"

"The lines show through the velvet." Is all Mindfang appears to be capable of saying, her voice coming out like a poorly-tuned symphony, spanning far too many octaves for one sentence. "Damnit Rosa don't you dare do it."

Ugh. This is the difficult part. She knows what she's meant to do in theory. There should be a lot of touching, she knows that much. And a good deal more wrist movement. But other than that she's a little... foggy.

"This would be so much easier if you weren't being so stubborn," Rosa grumbles into Mindfang’s ear. "I'm doing my best but I am new at this."

"I am never letting you drink ever again."

"I am never letting you drink ever again." Mindfang hisses, reaching down in one last, uninspired attempt to move her hand away.

Rosa growls to express her displeasure at this phrasing and, then, feeling like it's not really working- nuzzles in close enough that she can sink her teeth into Mindfang’s neck.

The moan that's incited is-- well-- exhilarating. So she bites her again, this time a few inches lower. Mindfang shudders and attempts to escape by throwing herself back against the padded back of the booth. This doesn't do her much good because Rosa follows, drunkenly nuzzling her.

"Don't tell me what to do," She murmurs, slurring a little. "Because if you're allowed to take revenge I'm sure I'm allowed to as well."

"...Is this your revenge?"

"Do you really want to set the precedent of using sex as a means of emotional warfare?" Rosa presses her knuckles into Mindfang's thigh. "Or are you going to let me do this?"

Mindfang makes an awful noise of frustration. It's partially enraged and partially sexual. Rosa appreciates this very much and for a second wonders whether or not they should be waiting until they're back at the hotel.

But instead, her wrist shifts and she instead presses her fingers against the warm folds of Mindfang's nook. This is the one part of her that is actually warm instead of just ten degrees from death.

Mindfang gasps, softly, and then whines. She reaches around Rosa to cling to her arm and slumps against Rosa, her breath draconically hot against her throat.

It takes a painful amount of effort not to panic about what to do next. She might not have done this before, but she's read about it and she's reasonably sure she can apply knowledge in the real world. She has been told that she's reasonably clever.

But the reality is vastly different from the perception. It's one thing to be huddled up under a hand-sewn quilt on a worn out old mattress with a tatted tawdry paperback half hidden beneath her pillow, reading by the faintest light refracted off the pages. There, reading about women entwined in
bed doing things that she's probably be executed for, things were easy enough to understand. Or at
least, puzzle out.

It's entirely different to be sitting here beside such a remarkable woman, their bodies pressed
together. To feel how alive she is, the muted shifts and twitches of her skin as she reacts to Rosa's
every touch. Her touch. She's doing this. She is. No one else.

"Touch me," Mindfang hisses, sharply, digging her nails into Rosa's elbow. "If you're going to do
this you're going to do this."

"What if I do it wrong?"

"Rosa how the fuck are you going to do this wrong? You can be bad but you can't be wrong."

"But--"

Mindfang pinches her again. Hard. "Rosa fucking do it already. Someone's going to see and you
can't get me this worked up and the not get me off."

"Okay. Okay." Rosa mutters, darkly. "But you'd better not be mean."

"Darling, if you get me off I won't have a single thing to say but your name." Mindfang presses her
face against Rosa's neck. "I might be grateful enough to return the favor."

Well. That's something. Rosa lets some of the tension leave her and wonders about the merits of
finishing Mindfang's wine for courage. No. That's probably a bad idea. Willing herself to shut off her
brain can only be so successful and--

She knows this shouldn't be a detached experience. That's demeaning to both of them. So she
musters the remnants of her courage, the pieces of her soul that enabled her to wake up every
morning and keep going through the leanest of times-- and-- goes for it.

Fuck all she can kill a man with her bare hands, why can't she use the same hands to get this
woman off? She grits her teeth and feels them slip against one another.

Mindfang nudges her, gently, and her eyelashes flicker against her neck. She keeps quiet, for once,
but Rosa can feel her body humming with anxiety.

It would be cruel to deny her. So she doesn't. When she finally presses her fingertips against the
welcoming warmth that is Mindfang's nook, she's naively surprised at how intimate it feels to be
touching her like this. Mindfang keens, the soft dying note of an albatross setting off to sea.

Rosa begins to explore with slow, yet steady, fingers. She brushes her fingers along the folds of her
nook and, taking a breath to steady herself, parts them. She's wet and warm and the faint smoldering
of pride this invokes in the primal parts of her brain is enough to motivate her to keep going.

She makes a few tentative gestures, slow, careful strokes that elicit a soft growl that trails off to an
impressively high pitch as Rosa goes in for the kill, tracing her fingers across the exposed bunch of
nerves where her bulge retracts. She might not be very savvy about the nuances of the female form,
but she knows the basics... especially after Mindfang made her very aware of how her own body
works.

"OhhhhhHHHHHh--" Mindfang gasps as Rosa brushes over the same nerves again, this time with
more firmness. Mindfang's practically melted into her, her breath huffing against her neck like she's
a dragon in the arctic. "Mmmm--"
She makes another pass, this time sure to add even more pressure. The response is just as strong so she feels as if it's safe to say that she is moving in the right direction. Mindfang’s slumped against her side, face pressed to her ear and it is decidedly wonderful to hear.

"That's it," Mindfang purrs, her voice making Rosa shudder herself and snuggle in closer.

Rosa works her hand into a better angle and begins to try in earnest to get Mindfang off. She works the pad of her thumb against her, heightening the pressure until Mindfang seems incapable of saying anything other than "yes, oh fuck, yes, yes, there--"

The proper combination seems to be a bit of force and short circular motions because Mindfang doesn't seem to be able to make words anymore which, well, is an accomplishment. She's shifting, anxiously, rocking against her hand as subtly as she can, still obviously unwilling to garner any unwarranted attention from the restaurant patrons. She's inching forward on the seat, and it's making it easier to, well-- to put it politely-- find her way around.

Mindfang is breathing hard against her throat in between moans and it's exciting. There's a few shaky syllables that sound like her name, the sharp hiss of an 'S' as in Rosa and it's gorgeous to hear her pleading for once instead of demanding. She's starting to see what Mindfang gets out of this. It doesn't make it any less stressful, however, to take the next step.

She keeps her thumb occupied as she slips her index finger into the depths of her nook. Mindfang yelps a little, putting her wrist to her mouth in an attempt to pretend it was a cough. But it's rather hard for her to hide her arousal when Rosa's inside her. She's warm, enticingly warm, and of course she's wet and-- well-- all the reading in the world couldn't prepare her for the intensity of the intimacy of being inside of someone else. Even if it's just her hand, she can feel Mindfang warm and tight around her and--

Well. She'd be a liar if she said she doesn't want to drag Mindfang home and go at it. But this isn't exactly a bad trade off. Especially as she works another finger inside her and she can feel Mindfang's nook tightening around her and hears her moan her name, the syllables broken with her effort to contain her pleasure.

Coordinating the shifting of her fingers and the movements of her thumb is just this side of difficult in the best way. The slow, forceful movement of her thumb against her bulge and the slow back and forth of her fingers inside her, shifting in and out and curling inside her in a way that she hopes is acceptable. Judging from the fact that Mindfang's only remaining upright because Rosa's propping her up; she's clinging to her arm and her neck seems to have lost all ability to remain stiff. She sounds almost as if she's about to cry, every sound drawn from her throat more than a little agonized. Each repetition of her name is more and more distorted until she can barely make out the 'a' at the end of each gasp.

"On the right track?" Rosa asks, her voice going low and raspy as she herself begins to feel more than a little... anxious herself. Mindfang keens when she does something just right and Rosa has to reach up and press her face into her neck to mute the noise.

She's pretty sure she is, judging from the fact that Mindfang seems rather incapable of replying. She's gone remarkably twitchy, her legs jerking around at dozens of angles and her hands are clenching on nothing, at her dress, at Rosa's dress, at the booth's cushion, at the tablecloth--

As Rosa keeps her fingers going, Mindfang begins to lose all semblance of composure. She slumps over the table, clinging to the table edge, taking some of the tablecloth with her and sending a few pieces of cutlery clanging dangerously. Mindfang's nook is twitching around her fingers, anxious quickening and relaxing around her fingers. It's-- well-- enticing. And more than a little ego-
For a woman who's usually so elegant, carrying herself with the posture of a nationless queen without a single thread of clothing out of place... it's a remarkable display. It gets even more remarkable when she drops her forehead against the table and almost howls. Rosa's quick with a napkin over her mouth but she can still feel the vibrations of her moan through her hand. Her legs twitch furiously and Rosa has the unfortunate experience of a heeled shoe making sharp contact with her toes.

Trying to keep her quiet is-- well-- bizarrely arousing. It probably shouldn't be, since someone's going to show up any second now and catch them at it--

But. Well. That's part of the fun, isn't it? Rosa leans over her, pressing her lips to her ear once more. "Do you want everyone to hear you?"

That doesn't help. If anything she moans even louder, a pained cacophony of sounds like an out of tune rainforest.. For the love of-- Rosa twists her hand once more and Mindfang's back shudders once more then-- abruptly-- she goes quiet.

Rosa doesn't stop touching her, of course. It seems rather rude to pull away immediately so she stays exactly where she is. Mindfang doesn't seem fully conscious of where she is, anyways, so perhaps she shouldn't be all that concerned with wronging her anymore.

She moves her hand against her a little more, testing the waters and-- well-- after a few moments she gets a response.

"Too much," Mindfang whispers, voice hoarse. "Give me a minute."

Rosa nods, pretending that she isn't excruciatingly proud of what she's just accomplished because she most certainly is. No one around them seems to have any idea what just happened; no one's looking at them at all askance, no one's calling security, no one seems angry and that's... sort of astounding.

"You okay?" Rosa murmurs, stroking Mindfang's hair as best she can without stabbing herself on a pin. Mindfang nods, or, at least it looks like a nod. Rosa slips her spare hand down to her neck and strokes the fine, pale hairs there softly, marveling at the fact that it still feels so excruciatingly intimate, considering what they just did. Well. What she just did to Mindfang--

She shivers herself, wishing Mindfang would sit up already so she could kiss her properly. But it's also impossible to deny the appeal of remaining here, up to her wrist in Mindfang's nook and feeling her body contract around her fingers in cadence with her slow, languorous heartbeat, feeling so blissfully close to her that retreating feels utterly sacrilegious.

Mindfang's making the same noises she makes when she's trying to pretend she's not sleepy. Rosa never took her at the type of woman to bask but that seems to be categorically incorrect; Mindfang seems utterly unwilling to move so much as a hair on her head. Thinking about it logically, Mindfang does seem like the type who would want to do nothing more than lie there and be cuddled after sex. They're usually cute. Right now she's perfect and nothing could be better. The only thing that could help this situation would be crawling into bed with her immediately and seeing how Mindfang plans on reciprocating.

She can't stop making tired kitten noises and Rosa chuckles. Mindfang sits up, slowly, like her back is a piece of stiff wool that's been twisted out of shape and refuses to lie flat anymore.
"No comments?" Rosa murmurs, smiling as Mindfang fidgets and nestles into her.

"You did just fine." Mindfang mutters, her voice melting down Rosa's ears. She sounds more satisfied than 'just fine'. "Even better considering it's your first time."

"That sounds like a rather backhanded compliment." Rosa says with a snort, beginning to work her fingers against Mindfang once more. She makes an awful noise but doesn't make any request for her to stop, so Rosa takes it as acquiescence. "Try to make a better one."

Mindfang grimaces and turns to nuzzle her. "It's not easy to get a woman off, Rosa. Especially in public."

"And I think that deserves a thank you." Rosa says, primly, and Mindfang guffaws, rolling her eyes. She looks so young and playful.

"Did I ask you to?" Mindfang hisses, sapphires shaking in her ears. A few tendrils of hair have escaped her elaborate hairstyle and Rosa brushes them back. She would really love to see what sort of mess she'd look like in a proper bed.

"You didn't complain." Rosa teases, crooking her fingers deep inside Mindfang once more. She jolts again and gives Rosa a scandalized stare. "So I think I deserve a thank-you."

Mindfang stares at her for a good ten seconds before breaking into laughter. Rosa rolls her eyes but doesn't try to stop her. She's still laughing when a trio of fellow patrons is led past their table. Her laughter quiets down and she bites her lip, hard, face going so pale it looks like she's been languishing in bleach.

Rosa laughs. She would like to tell Mindfang this is exactly what she gets but that would ruin some of the glory of the moment. The end of the train of diners pauses to see where the cackling came from and--within seconds--his face lights up.

"Marquise! I didn't know you'd returned to the civilized world!" He crows, smiling exuberantly and throwing his arms wide as if he's going to hug her. Rosa sucks in her breath sharply between her teeth. Of course, of course Vienna knows them.

The Marquise in question is gaping. Rosa kicks her under the table and, thankfully, she's adroit enough to realize she looks like an idiot and instantly composes herself.

Rosa forgot how noble she can look when she's temperamental. It's impressive. Even more impressive considering that Rosa's still got her fingers buried inside her nook. She sits up straight, rolling her shoulders back, tossing her hair out of her eyes and schooling her face into a calm, dignified expression. Rosa blushes for her all the same.

The other two diners stop short and, within moments, are clustered around their table. Rosa finds herself wanting to crawl under the table and die.

Mindfang's still the picture of aristocratic benevolence, however, and gives each one of them a warm smile.

"My my, I hardly expected to find any of you here," She says, reaching out to squeeze the hand of the petite woman stranded between a pair of impressively tall men. "My dear how have you been?"

"Much better for seeing you, Spineret," She teases, taking Mindfang's hand and laughing. "How are you?"
"I'm doing quite well." She murmurs, wrapping a possessive arm around Rosa's shoulders and sitting back as if this is the most casual encounter in the world. Rosa's too busy panicking over whether or not they can see anything beneath the tablecloth.

"What brings you to this part of the world? It's a long way from home, isn't it?" Mindfang asks, tilting her head to one side and looking curiously conversational. "Is there a revolt someone didn't write me about?"

The sturdier looking man-- not the one to originally greet them-- scoffs. Mindfang meets his eyes and winks.

"Someone was feeling underappreciated and informed us that we should do something nice," He mutters, dryly. "As if some of us don't have work to be doing. There's a pointed glare across the trio and the eyes of both men meet.

The other, more ebullient, man snarls. "Just because some of us aren't spending all of our time arguing about laws and words and arrest records doesn't mean that we're any less intelligent!"

"Not us. Not us. You. You're less intelligent."

This is distinctly uncomfortable. Rosa shrinks back against Mindfang, just in time to yelp and jolt forwards when the tiny little woman reaches up and slaps her palms over both their faces.

"Boys." She breathes, her voice sweet and soft but still somehow horrifying. "We're not doing this over dinner. Don't you dare be rude in front of our friend."

Rosa's eye twitches. Rude. Yes. Bickering is so incredibly rude. She can think of a few other things that might be occurring that are rude.

"Still trying to make this whole--" Mindfang makes a dismissive hand gesture, smirking a little. "Grey three-way going?"

There's a few good natured groans and some eye-rolling that indicates that this is an age-old argument, not a new insult.

"Coming from the woman who's only working with a kismesis in her back pocket? Not that he's even a proper excuse for a man." He raises his eyebrows and gives Mindfang something that can only be a dismissive stare. "Not all of us are content spending our lives alone, Vienna."

The grumpy man is now her favorite. She would like to buy him a bottle of wine. But she does feel Mindfang twinge (not hard to when she's wrist deep) and that docks him a few points.

Mindfang tenses and her eyebrows slash down at an angry slant that Rosa knows, from history, can't end well. Rosa nudges her fingers against her and her face, once more, goes blank.

"I'm not invisible, am I?" She murmurs, just enough to be audible. "Or do I not count?"

Mindfang's lips twitch. "No. No I'm pretty sure that you're a figment of my imagination, sweetheart."

"Oh. Well then. That explains why you're paying for dinner." Rosa mutters, huffing and, as best as she can with her hand still carefully hidden, kisses Mindfang's cheek. Mindfang squalls and wrinkles her nose. Rosa snarls back, showing her fangs.
"Who's this then?" The man grumbles, giving Rosa an appraising stare. "Where'd you pick her up? Poor woman probably has no idea what she got herself into. What did you do, pay her?"

Rosa can't resist. She should, really, since this is meant to be helping Mindfang feel better about her prowess as a woman in a relationship, but it's hard to resist. "Bought me actually."

"Oh? Do tell." Grumpy man is not amused. Rosa's disappointed in this; for her favorite he really should have a better sense of humor. Also she should really consider moving her hand.

"She was very expensive." Mindfang agrees, solemnly, resting her chin on Rosa's shoulder, hiding her face against Rosa's neck when she begins to rub against her once more. "You don't even know what I've had to go through."

"Only way to get a woman, huh?"

"I wouldn't be so sure. She hasn't been that much of a disappointment. She's very pretty. And seems to be intelligent enough if you keep her away from alcohol."

"And if you keep your clothes on."

"Yes, that does seem to be a detriment to your mental faculties."

"Oh stop, they're adorable, don't be mean, Carter." The woman scolds, jabbing him in the stomach, which is the only part of his body she can readily reach. "Look at how happy she is! Have you ever seen this woman smile?"

That makes Rosa sad. Sad enough that she starts in at Mindfang's neck once more, kissing her until she's shooed away.

"We'd ask to join you but we'd hate to interrupt. You two look very content. We'd hate to be a nuisance." The woman murmurs, politely, clearly marking this as the end of the conversation.

"Oh, goodness no, not in the least!" Rosa says, before she can stop herself. Decades of overt politeness is hard to overcome, it would appear. "Please, join us! We're just about to have dessert."

She shakes her head, laughing. "I don't think the Marquise looks too pleased with that idea. We'll take our leave. Boys?"

Two of them drift off, following the waiting concierge to their own table. Carter, the grumpy one, lingers. He leans in close, definitely violating Mindfang's personal space to glare at her. This close she can tell that he has to be only a few unfortunate shades bluer than violet. Rosa's hair rises and she bites back the urge to hiss at him until he leaves.

"Look, Ven, this is the last time I'm going to say this. You need to watch yourself."

Mindfang's composure breaks and she lets out a threatening snarl. "For the love of the Empire, Carter, I know what I'm doing--"

"We've got a new girl and she's being sent for your head and damnit Vienna, she might actually get it."

"Over my dead body." Rosa snaps, before she can really help it. "Are you threatening her because I am more than happy to--"
"Rosa shut up. He's my lawyer, we need him."

He looks smug and Rosa wants to punch him. "I'm the best you're going to get, sweetie. Also, Vienna, the fuck are you doing getting a matesprit without doing the paperwork."

"She's not--"

"When's the last time this woman followed the law?" Rosa snaps, unwilling to let Mindfang embarrass herself. "And I don't care if you're the most selfless man on the face of this planet, I don't deal with government officials."

"Well, considering that the government executed the most selfless man on the face of the planet for being a little too revolutionary I'm not sure I'm too broken up about you thinking I'm awful."

That's it, he definitely isn't her favorite. It's only the fact that she's still rather comfortably ensconced beside and inside of Mindfang that keeps her from finding an extremely creative way to murder him.

"Carter, darling, she's going to rip your face off if you don't get out of here." Mindfang hisses, like Rosa can't hear her. "And as much as I love you, I don't really like to get on her bad side."

Carter frowns but is quick to vanish, following his ashen partners to a table on the other side of the room. As soon as he's out of sight, Mindfang lets out a strangled screech.

"Get your hand out of there right now before I break it off. Mindfang growls. "I love you for this exhibitionist streak you're showing, but I am incredibly embarrassed."

Rosa would be offended if she wasn't so busy brainstorming the easiest way to murder her Mistress's lawyer without her realizing. "No one saw, don't be such a prude."

"I'm going to murder you in your sleep." Mindfang says, sweetly, her voice breaking a little as Rosa slips her fingers out of her. Her fingers are wet with Mindfang's genetic fluid and it doesn't take that much debate before she wipes the worst of it off on Mindfang's thigh.

Rosa gives her a disparaging stare before huffing, loudly, and rolling her eyes. She's distracted, now, and Mindfang can tell because she nudges Rosa with her toes under the table. "No you won't, I'm too expensive."

"Knew I should have bought insurance." Is all Mindfang has to say for herself. She wordlessly hands Rosa a napkin and raises her eyebrows. She cleans herself off wordlessly, glowering across the room.

"Do you want to go back to the hotel and have sex?"

Rosa gives her a shocked stare, blood rushing from her face. "Vienna, you can't say something like that in public-- Someone might hear!"

And that's when Mindfang gives up maintaining any sort of pretense that she's in control, collapsing over the table and laughing with the giddiness of a woman who just can't do this anymore.

"I have no words for how much affection I have for you in this moment." Mindfang manages to get out after she's caught her breath. "But that might just be the orgasm talking."

"Vienna!"

She laughs and squeezes Rosa by the waist. “Fine, fine. We’ll finish dinner but I want to go on
record as having said I’d prefer that we go have sex. In a bed. With a locked door.”

“Shall I go get your lawyer? Make sure he knows?” She asks, innocently. “I mean, we should make sure it’s official.”

Mindfang kicks her.

* * *

They finish dinner quickly, neither of them meeting their waiter’s eye when he comes to bring the check. Mindfang pays on account which requires nothing more than her signature and all but drags Rosa from the restaurant. She’s still intoxicated and it takes a bit of effort on Mindfang’s behalf to keep her from running into traffic which, at this time of the evening, is a bizarre mix of cars and carriages. Mindfang manages to hail a passing driver and—after inspecting the horses—drags Rosa inside the carriage.

She’s half asleep when they make it back to the hotel. Mindfang shakes her awake to climb the stairs and she halfheartedly attempts to express the notion that she does not, in fact, want to sleep beside Mindfang tonight—that she doesn’t want to do anything. But Mindfang ignores her and Rosa gives the point up as moot.

Because at the end of the day, she’s right. No matter how noble Mindfang tries to be things are always going to come back to the fact that she’s in charge—she makes the serious decisions, the ones that will have an actual impact on their lives.

She’s drunk enough that, for a moment, she considers the fact that she might be making too much of her swanning around like a queen all the time. Perhaps even if she and Rosa were of the same caste, the same noble background—the same education—perhaps she’d still be like this, bossy and snappy, angry when she doesn’t get her way. Perhaps she should let it go. Because when Mindfang shoves her into bed, struggling with the line of buttons down the back of her dress before she’ll let Rosa descend into drunken slumber, she still has her own papers folded up tightly and resting against her heart and when she lays down beside her, she makes no attempt to touch her.

“I’m not getting another hotel room at 1am and I’m not sleeping on the couch.” She mutters, awkwardly acknowledging Rosa’s request to be alone. “So… don’t be mad. I heard you. And I won’t try anything so… don’t worry about it.”

It’s not perfect. None of this is. But it’s an attempt. And Rosa can berate her all she wants for being painfully overbearing and incessantly aggravated but right now, she can’t bring herself to mind. Perhaps she minds the bullying and the yelling but the smothering affection and the pathetic attempts to earn her back are…

Endearing isn’t strong enough. So she drags herself over to where Mindfang is huddled up on the far side of the mattress, blankets pulled around her. She shakes her shoulder until Mindfang groans and faces her.

“What?”

“I feel bad.” She says, her voice heavy with alcohol and exhaustion. “I don’t like you being sad. Or angry with me. Don’t be sad.”

“How can I not be sad, Annora?” Mindfang says, her voice quavering on Rosa’s name. “I’m not good enough for you.”

Rosa shakes her head and throws herself onto of her, head resting against her chest. “No. No, that’s
not it. I mean, you aren’t—well—perfect but, you’re trying. I know you are. And you’re... silly. Not cruel.”

“Wow, I feel so much better.”

“I’m sorry I can’t say it.” She mumbles, sadly. “I would if I could. But I can’t.”

“What can’t you do?”

Rosa shakes her head and groans, a sound that she didn’t know herself capable of making until she was introduced to over imbibing. She sits up, slowly, slouching over and staring at her bare thighs. “I just. I loved him so much and he died. And so did the other ones. And I—I don’t know if I’m strong enough to do it again.”

Mindfang opens her eyes, suddenly, a sharp light materializing. She pushes herself up on her arms and looks like a dog who’s caught the scent of a fox and is closing in on the kill but knows if she barks too loud her prey will run. “What are you saying?”

“That I would tell you if I could but I’m too scared. Because if I say it it’s real and if it’s real it can be taken away. And I don’t want that. I want you. And your stupid head.” Rosa says all this to her hands, curling her fingers and then allowing them to relax. Mindfang’s pendant still hangs heavy around her neck and she begins to fidget with the chain, wrapping it around her wrist and then letting it spin away. “And I don’t know what to do. Because I shouldn’t... I shouldn’t like you. You bought me. That means I can’t like you. But I sort of really, really really, really like you.”

Mindfang doesn’t say a word, but when Rosa musters the power to meet her eyes for a moment, she looks like she’s finally rediscovered a book she read long, long ago that she just rediscovered and is remembering bit by bit.

“I just. You’ve done this before. You know what you’re doing. You’ve—you’ve got him, you’ve had... others.” She doesn’t like acknowledging that and does so with an angry flash of fang. “But I haven’t. And I don’t—I don’t know. Because how can you—“

She has to say it. Even this drunk, she knows she sounds like an idiot.

“How can you love me? You barely know me. And I’m barely alive, I’m useless, I’m—I’m broken. I don’t understand what you mean when you say you love me. I don’t get it. But it scares me because —I don’t know.” She sighs, her stomach sucking into her ribs. “You’ve given me a reason to stay alive and I didn’t think I’d have that again.”

It feels like a second betrayal to say that out loud, as if this time around she’s the one shooting her son in the side and staring, impassively, as he screams. But she knows that’s not true—that’s not true at all. Because she’s not stupid. She’s in mourning but never, not once, would he begrudge her this. Or would he? Mindfang’s a noblewoman. She has money, she has power—she works for the Empress. But she doesn’t, though—not really. She robs them blind and then sits and pretends not to know what her peers are saying when they make pointed comments about her ‘collecting’, her ‘travels’. But she bought a slave--

But not more. Not plural. Just Rosa. Perhaps there were more, at one time, perhaps there’s some somewhere. But not on Mindfang’s ship, not in the hold, not at the canons, not even in the kitchen. Just Rosa, lying in her bed and reading her books, laughing at her jokes and making her smile.

Does that make it better? She wants it to. She wants to find a reason to excuse everything about her, all the things she berated her for today. She wants to grab her by the face and lie, tell her she was
wrong, that Mindfang is perfect and wonderful and should never change.

She won’t. That won’t help. She needs to know.

“And… it was unfair of me to be so angry with you. You’ve.. you’ve done so much for me.”

“I don’t want your gratitude.”

“No. No don’t do that I hate it when you do that. Let me finish.” Rosa grumbles, drunkenly trying to shoo her away, forcing Mindfang to duck in order to avoid corneal trauma. “I just—you’ve been through a lot with me. Put up with a lot. And I don’t know many people who’d do that just to protect an investment. And I don’t know anyone who would care about me anymore.”

“You must know that’s not true.”

“Maybe it isn’t. But you’re risking so much to… to have me with you. But you never mention it. You never talk about it. And—I don’t know. I get sad when I don’t see you for a few hours and I feel so bad about hurting you because—because you seem to think that if I don’t say the words I don’t care. But I do. I just—”

Mindfang sucks in her breath.

“I need to be sure before… before I do this again.” Rosa lies back down, flat on her back with her arms above her. Mindfang, still above her, stares down at her wordlessly. “So don’t… don’t do the thing. Don’t do the thing where you assume the worst because… I don’t know what to call how I feel about you but it isn’t apathetic. And it isn’t angry. And it isn’t gratitude because fuck you you bought me why should I be grateful?”

Mindfang winces, but she still smiles a little. “Well, at least we’re getting that out there.”

“Bossyfangs.” Rosa grumbles, rolling her eyes. “You’re just bossy and silly and scared of me, aren’t you?”

Mindfang’s face goes fuzzy, taken aback by Rosa’s words. She lowers herself over Rosa, seating herself comfortably on her hips. “I’m scared of you?”

“Yes. You don’t know what to do with me or what to do with how you feel.” Rosa pushes herself up onto her elbows, ignoring the fact that this is the same exact view she had when Mindfang made love to her for the first time, so gentle and calm in the face of so much frustration. She might not be a good woman but she’s a good… lover.

Rosa wrinkles her nose at the imagine connotations of that word and Mindfang looks less than pleased with the way events are going. “But that’s silly because I don’t either. I think we’re just weird and destined to be weird and can’t I just like you a lot? And I don’t just mean a lot I mean really a lot.”

“You’re not going to remember this tomorrow, are you?” Mindfang finally mutters, huffing. “This is useless. You don’t mean any of this. You just want me to feel better and it’s not going to work.”

She will remember. At least she hopes she will. Alcohol might make her do stupid things but at least it’s making her deal with this. “I cannot say, but I am very drunk and suddenly very sad and want it to be less sad. Don’t be sad. I like you a lot. Why does it have to have a name?”

“Because I want that. I want someone to love me.” She admits, huffing. “And I want that someone to be you because you’re just—you’re everything that I’ll never be and I—I feel like a better person when I have you around. I like myself when you’re around. Except when you’re yelling at me. But
that’s okay because someone has to.”

“I’m good at yelling.” Rosa admits, laughing and collapsing flat once more. “I’m kind of mean. You’re not mean, you’re just grumpy. I’m mean.”

“Well, you said it not me.” Mindfang squeezes her waist. “But. You’re the most amazing woman who I’ve ever had like me. And I want you with me.”

“Sammeeeee.” Rosa groans, reaching up for her. Mindfang lowers herself down and they curl up together, foreheads touching. “Don’t... don’t be sad because I’m crazy. Be sad because I don’t know your wriggling day or your favorite color.”

“Eighth of the eighth and blue.” Mindfang answers, casually. “C’mon Rosa.”

“Well you know what I mean. Can we--- can we just try? Not do anything but try to be happy before we name everything?” Rosa stares into her eyes, heart pounding because, well, what will she do if Mindfang says no? She can’t lose her.

“...Okay.” Mindfang mutters, huffing. “But only for now. And only because I think you’re in love with me and are just too fucked up to say it.”

“Isn’t that what I just said?” Rosa grumbles, closing her eyes and rolling over, pulling a pillow close to her chest. “Not talking to you anymore.”

Mindfang, for once, has nothing to say. So she wraps her arms around her, hands icy against Rosa’s skin and she hisses. But she doesn’t shove her away, or whine when the three duvets are pulled over them because—

Well.

She’s kind of right about everything.
in which the author sort of got carried away.

Chapter Summary

Awkward morning conversations, more awkward conversations and a forthright acknowledgement of how fucked up their relationship is. It's a real party for everyone involved!

Chapter Notes

There isn't any plot in this chapter. There was going to be and then I wanted to work in some bits and pieces of ideas I had for things and this basically turned into a massive sex scene. 32 pages of this chapter is sex. You have been warned.

I was going to include plot... and then it got long. So I decided to post it in time for Christmas and get to the plot next chapter. Cheers!

When she wakes up she is, for once, not covered in enough blankets to insulate the north pole. Stretching out to make sure that Mindfang hasn't frozen to death in the night, she finds an empty bed. It takes only a perfunctory glance over her shoulder to discover where she’s gone. Mindfang's wearing her robe and her lingerie and nothing more as she leans against the balcony overlooking the ocean. There's a coffee mug curled in her hands, fingers impressively dainty against the roundness of it. She's still got her earrings in but she's let her hair down around her back, but it's mussed like they spent the night making passionate love in a pile of leaves.

She still looks gorgeous, though. Long, elegant legs that are just a little on the thick side where they meet her full hips, a waist that arches in with just as much drama as her personality and breasts that are begging to be handled, weighed in the palms of her hands as Mindfang looms over her in bed. Rosa can't see her ribs which is a briefly stymieing experience until she realizes that Mindfang has probably never gone hungry a day in her adult life.

Rosa sits up, slowly. Mindfang's ears twitch at the sound of shifting fabric but she doesn't turn. Rosa slumps forward over her legs, mouth hanging open and eyes too heavy to keep open. She can taste the remains of last night's dalliance on her teeth and she drunkenly wonders how hard it would be to find her toothbrush.

Too hard, she agrees, speaking to an unknown audience in her head. Bed's nicer. The mattress is rising around her, a warm feather top, and the duvets are piled around her like a nest of murdered bird children.

Oh hell she's drunk. Even ten hours later she's still buzzed. Rosa shakes her hair out of her face but it doesn't move very well.

"I want you." Rosa groans, dropping her head back and staring up at the ceiling. "Get here."

Mindfang turns, finally, setting her cup on the marble balustrade. In the light of the late morning sun
she's not at her sexiest-- she looks cozy and affectionate rather than smug and sexy. But still pretty. Pretty in the best way possible because she can have this pretty.

"What was that, Pet?" Mindfang murmurs, leaning back on her elbows and striking an elegant pose. That would look so much better by moonlight. Really it would. But she still looks like a total cutie.

Ugh. She sounds thirteen.

She rolls her eyes and throws her shoulders back, hoping to show her breasts off to better advantage. All she succeeds in doing is jostling Mindfang's pendant out from between them. "Come and get me, Miss High and Mighty."

"Well. When you put it that way," Mindfang purrs and, in just a few moments she's bouncing onto the bed. She splays herself out beside Rosa and presses her face to her neck.

Rosa yelps at the feel of her ocean-cold nose but doesn't pull her away. Mindfang drags her fingers across the lace of her bustier, nails snagging into the fabric before pulling away.

"We should get you out of those clothes, huh?" Mindfang whispers into her neck, breath like dragon fire on her collarbone as she sits up to loom over her. "You look like a mess."

She giggles and hooks a leg over Mindfang's hips, unnecessarily bareing herself to Mindfang. "You just want to see me... naked."

"Pet, I have done more than see you when you're naked." Mindfang teases, slapping her ass with a light 'smack' of solid muscle against flesh. "Don't tempt me to do more, huh?"

Rosa pretends that the gasp she lets out at the gesture is nothing but surprise, hoping that Mindfang won't notice the fact that she goes from drunk and a little energetic to curious in a few seconds flat. She doesn't, of course because while Mindfang is a gloriously intelligent woman, at the moment she has better things to worry about.

She pins Rosa to the bed with a ferocious snarl, giving her a predatory once over that's accompanied by a dangerous smirk that seems to imply 'I am going to fuck you over and you can't do a thing about it'. It is incredibly arousing. Rosa would like to say that outright but, well, she's beginning to enjoy the feeling of Mindfang chasing after her.

The feeling of being wanted, she supposes. She probably wouldn't enjoy this attention anywhere near as much if she weren't as fond as Mindfang. Or if they weren't in a pseudo-committed relationship.

But, as things are, the attention is very appreciated. Isn't it bizarre that things she'd fight tooth and nail against in any other situation are things that she smiles at now? Like Mindfang running her hands down her stomach, pressing against her ribs and lingering at her hips where she sinks her fingernails into the exposed timber wolf-grey flesh where her clothing fails to meet. Or the fact that she snaps the strap of her garter against her thigh instead of being at all productive in the undressing process.

"So much pretty," Mindfang purrs, pulling Rosa's head to the side so she can cover her shoulder in a series of bites and kisses. Rosa shivers and carefully grips the mouth of Mindfang's robe, begging herself not to go for the crown jewels before admiring their shine. "But it's all hiding away."

"I see what you did there," Rosa gasps, trying to sound sultry and losing all ability to do so when Mindfang rakes her nails down her arms, raising a series of angry citrine lines across her skin.

It's a scene from the worst romance novels where everything always plays out the same, the formula
only altered slightly to fit the situation. Rosa can practically predict what’s going to happen next and--well-- she doesn't quite mind.

Still, when Mindfang goes to undo the series of ribbons and hooks holding her bust enhancing mess of lace together, she stops her with a kiss, shoving Mindfang’s hands into her lap. No. Not yet. She likes this, the unspoken luxury of lying close to her.

Even if she wants to smack her with a book of good sense with a few annotations about tact, she’s still an impossibly attractive pirate; Rosa won’t lie about that. Nor will she deny herself.

Mindfang lets herself be distracted from her goal. She does not, however, allow Rosa to be in charge for long; within moments of the first brush of their lips Mindfang's hand works into the thickness of her hair and she pulls Rosa's head back, establishing dominance with a sharp yank.

It hurts but in a soft way and-- of course-- she likes it. Mindfang keeps a tight hold on her as she kisses her, more roughly than is merited. It's not the slow, languid embrace of morning but the passionate intensity of a woman who’s just finally realized how fancy her partner's underwear is.

"I don't know where the hell you got this but you're taking me there so I get to see what I want you in," Mindfang grumbles, struggling to undo the straps that are valiantly holding her stockings in place, even after a night spent in them.

Rosa rolls her eyes, lifting a leg so that Mindfang can struggle to get her undressed, pulling the sheer silk off over her toes. "What about me?"

"What about you? I'd be buying things for you-- I don't see the issue--" Mindfang's working herself up to a rant (and Rosa loves it), but she cuts her off with a snort.

"Things work both ways." Rosa pauses a little. Does it? No. No she's sure Mindfang would be attractive in ridiculously priced lingerie. It seems that the more expensive things are, the less opaque the clothing gets.

Mindfang rolls her eyes and pulls off her other stocking by yanking instead of undoing the straps. A massive run erupts immediately and Rosa hisses.

"You're paying for that." She says, by way of explanation. Mindfang rolls her eyes and digs her fingernails into Rosa's thighs, leaving a series of spearmint-green crescent marks.

"I already did." She climbs back up onto the bed and shoves Rosa back down, hard. Rosa hits the mattress with a remarkably loud thud, breath fleeing her lungs. "All of this. All of it. All of the things--"

"So you've said," Rosa grumbles, stretching herself out as long as she can just to luxuriate at the feel at her vertebra cracking. "If you don't hurry up I'm going to do this myself."

Mindfang shakes her head, hair tickling Rosa's shoulders. "No. I need to earn some dominance back after last night."

"I'm far too hungover for sex." Rosa informs her, voice dragging over her own ears like a cloth bag on gravel. "Don't make me."

"Ugh, no, I'm just going to take your clothes off and make you sleep. Do I look awake enough for sex? No, no I do not." Mindfang jabs Rosa in the side until she rolls over onto her stomach. She stifles a pained moan as her still incredibly tender breasts are pressed into the too-firm mattress.
She'd forgotten about this part. The part where piercing your nipples hurts more than it feels nice, when the adrenaline wears off and the endorphins aren't that strong yet. It's not that bad, though, just barely painful enough to make her think about it.

Mindfang unlaces her clothing in a matter of moments; if there's one thing she does with record speed, it's remove underwear. Rosa sits up before Mindfang can finish the job, not trusting either of them not to get up to any funny business if she is actually undressed.

She sits up to take the ridiculously shapeless piece of lace off, praising every higher power for the fact that she didn't fall asleep in a corset. Bustiers-- exponentially better than corsets. At least for her. She doesn't have much to support but Mindfang probably shouldn't switch over.

As she pulls the straps off her arms, however, she's quickly confronted with a bit of a... problem. The lace comes off of her right breast with a only bit of uncomfortable resistance; she might have an impressively short healing time, even for a rare bleded troll, but that doesn't mean that her body doesn't react the same as anyone else's. Which her polite way of saying that while she isn't bleeding profusely, there's still some dried bodily fluid that's stuck the lace to her breast. But it comes off easily enough when she eases it away, millimeter by millimeter.

Her left breast, however, is where the issue lies.

"Damn. I knew I should have bandaged these," Rosa grumbles, glaring down at her breast where one of the rings has twisted its way into the lace. She tugs a few times at the garment to no avail; the fabric is twisted into the metal and it hurts too much to yank.

"Bandaged what?" Mindfang mutters, slipping off the bed and tying her robe. "Did you somehow manage to hurt yourself when I wasn't looking?"

Rosa assumes she's being purposefully obtuse. "Do we have a small scissors or a seam ripper?"

"No." Mindfang stoops to grab one of the pillows off the floor, throwing it onto the bed just before her. "What the hell is with you, Rosa?"

"My nipple ring is caught in this idiotically lacy contraption and I'm not about to rip it out, okay?" She hisses, through gritted teeth. "It hurts!"

Mindfang doesn't say a word, which is sort of surprising. Rosa might be drunk but she's not forgetful-- Mindfang always has something to say. But instead of speaking a syllable she just shuffled towards the foot of the bed and gives Rosa a measured stare. Ever so slowly her gaze travels south from her eyes to her breasts and she sucks in an agonized breath.

"Well I'll be damned. You actually did it."

Rosa tugs at the lace once more, accurately guessing that Mindfang is not going to be any help in solving this dilemma. Damn woman never stops thinking with her libido. "Why would I lie?"

Mindfang crosses her arms over her chest and gives Rosa a very judgmental stare. "To make me mad."

"I'm drunk enough still that I'll concede that point." She grumbles, taking a deep breath through her nose because she is very sleepy and would quite like to crawl back under the covers now and there's only one way that's happening.

Another deep breath. Another. And then she yanks. Mindfang is the one who yelps, covering her eyes and almost hitting the floor in an attempt not to watch. The lace comes away with an
unexpected amount of ease when she moves fast enough. Rosa drops it to the bed beside her, sending up a silent prayer of gratitude at the fact that she did not scream and that it didn't hurt as badly as anticipated.

She glances down at her chest and, yes, everything's intact-- a saltwater bath would probably be helpful as well as some gauze and a proper undergarment but she's not in that dire of a condition that she feels the need to do any of that immediately.

If this were her teenage years, she wouldn't hesitate because-- let's be honest-- as a teenage girl she was quite a bit easier to kill, maim or otherwise cause devastating injury. As an adult, and an adult jade blood at that, she's not too concerned about it. Is it irresponsible? Completely. But seeing as she was almost murdered by the woman who's in love with her's Kismesis just a few weeks ago...

She'll let it slide.

"Is it over?" Mindfang asks in a tiny, pained voice, face still hidden in her hands and hair. Oh goodness. Rosa glances at her and does her best not to laugh. "Please be okay."

"I'm fine." She murmurs, checking to make sure that both rings are still in place, wondering if she should find a pair of pliers and make sure they're both still on tightly enough.

Mindfang doesn't look up. "Is there any blood?"

Rosa doesn't laugh. There’s not much that unnerves Mindfang but this, apparently, does. Nipple rings and self-mutilation seem to be Mindfang's breaking points.

Funny how they're both things Rosa's done to herself.

"No. No there is not. It just hurt." Rosa assures her.

"Promise? I don't want to see any blood."

"You didn't seem this upset about blood when I murdered several men and left them on your bedroom floor. Or when you murdered several men. Or when you carried me, mangled, off your lovely boyfriend's ship. Or when I--"

"Different circumstances," Mindfang hisses, peeking through her fingers.Apparently satisfied that, no, Rosa is not lying to her, she straightens. "I don't like it when people start bleeding unexpectedly! If I didn't know you'd throw me out for it I would demand you take those stupid things out immediately so I don't have to keep worrying that you're going to rip them out of your chest accidentally."

"...That's very unlikely." Rosa would like to tease her but she's gone incredibly pale, the color of the sterling teapot sitting on the table reflecting the morning sun, and doesn't look quite up to any harassment. "Calm down."

Rosa sinks back onto the mattress and yawns, jaw cracking. On a whim she holds up the fancy bustier up to examine for any obvious flaws.

"No harm done," She decides, tossing it at Mindfang. "Although they didn't get me the reaction I'd hoped for whatsoever. You didn't even seem to notice."

Mindfang catches it easily. "A bit of embellishment is always appreciated, my darling, but it's hardly needed when the original is already more than enough to worship."
Rosa snorts. "Like you'd worship anyone but yourself. You'd kill anyone to get the attention you think you deserve."

"Been there, done that," Mindfang grumbles. But she doesn't meet Rosa's eyes, wandering back over to the balcony. "And you're more of the type of goddess you keep hostage in a temple, not the head of a religious oligarchy."

She wraps a sheet around her and yawns. "That's fine. It means I don't have to do any good deeds for society."

If she were at all good at this whole 'loving companion' bit, she'd shove aside her hangover to ask her what that face means, the dark broody 'I am a pirate, fear me' face. Rosa hates that face.

But she's not just hungover, she's slightly intoxicated. So instead of being the good friend, the obsequious lover, the kindly mother, instead of being any of that-- she pulls a pillow over her face and falls asleep.

* * *

When she awakes for a second time, she no longer feels playful and sultry-- she just feels awful.

Guilt slams into her first, guilt over having been so cruel to Mindfang and guilt that she might have given her false hope-- the woman trusts her and, well, using her fears against her isn't anything but abhorrent. Once the first tidal wave of guilt subsides, the next wave-- embarrassment-- washes up because why did she think it was at all acceptable to do that in public. And when that goes away all she feels is nauseous.

There isn't anyone else in the room, which is a pleasant surprise; she was expecting to have a wounded pirate lurking over her like a lioness making sure her supper won't try to run away before the sacrifice.

Mindfang's left a glass of water and a few aspirin tablets on the nightstand, a full pitcher standing beside both. Rosa downs them, unsure if medicine will work, given her metabolism, but assuming it can't hurt her. She sits up sluggishly, sheets pooling around her waist. Mindfang has left the balcony door open and a cool afternoon breeze blows around the curtain. The smell of the salt air, musky with seaweed and the faintest scent of wet limestone, makes up for the chill. Rosa breathes it in before dropping her throbbing head to her shoulder. Her skin is warm from sleep, the natural cooling cycle of her body at sleep mitigated by the warmth of a pile of blankets. She smells of exertion and the luxury, Mindfang's expensive perfume and the excitement of doing something wrong that she won't be held accountable for.

She swings her legs off of the mattress and stands, slowly, on legs that ache from a night spent in shoes far taller than she's used to. Her head is full of a sandstorm but she does her best to stumble through it, taking Mindfang's dressing gown from where it's been left on the floor and wrapping it around her. Rosa stumbles over to the window, staring over the balcony.

The ocean beyond the windows is chaotic-- raging against the cliffs and tossing the boats in a distant harbor up and down like leaves on the wind. If they were at sea, she knows, she'd be safely curled up in Mindfang's cabin, huddled-- knitting-- in bed while she prays to any higher power that this will safely pass. And when the ocean gives up her furious quest to pull her Queen to the sandy bottom, Mindfang would slip inside, soaking wet and smelling of damp leather and immediately request ablutions.

It shouldn't make her smile. But it does. As she closes the balcony door, checking to make sure it's been locked, a soft laugh escapes her. Her whole adult life has been spent trying to escape the
tyranny of the sea and now all she can do is look at the water and yearn. She doesn't look too long-- her head begs reprieve and soon enough she's splayed out over the armchair staring at the ceiling.

Is it time to begin to forget? She stares up at the ceiling, at the pattern painted there-- a constantly repeating quatrefoil of blue and gold. Has it been long enough? Will it ever be long enough? Is it fair to them? The three children who had chosen her to be their everything, who had given her their inalienable trust up until they were lead away to die and even then refused to see her guilt.

There was never an ultimate price to her. It was never as real. They all knew they'd live fast, die young-- suffering is inevitable so it should be made worth it. She had none of that hanging over her head; no one could execute her, no one would ever even try. She would suffer, yes, but not pay that final, mortal tax to their Empress.

But is it fair? Is it fair to keep them alive like this? Alive always in suffering instead of joy, always keeping an effigy burning instead of the embers of stories murmured over the fire or the remnants laughter ringing out in the darkness before hastily stifled by Rosa's glower.

She would like to remember them like that sometime. Perhaps letting them be happy in her memory-- the one place they're still alive-- is in itself a subversion. They weren't criminals, dying for their cause. They were children, happy and free and determined-- and that's how they should remain.

Rosa idly wraps the chain of the sapphire pendant around her fingers, watching the stone whiz back and forth with the eyes of a woman possessed. And isn't it throwing it in their faces, that they let her live and this is the life she's been cursed with?

She's become a bona fide courtesan, a plaything of an aristocrat-- the mistress of a pirate-- kept in nothing but the utmost of luxury. They won't let her die and she's sure as hell going to make sure the Empire's pissed about it.

It isn't a perfect revenge, of course. But it's something. She sighs and idly kicks at the arm of the sofa a few feet away from her. The responsible thing would be to talk to Marcus about all of this. Get her feelings out into the ether instead of slowly condensing into diamonds within the recesses of her conscience. But she knows she's just going to keep ignoring it until something forces her to stop.

She keeps staring up at the ceiling above her, hoping someone will come along and tell her what she's supposed to do now. She's not so good with idle time-- especially when Mindfang might very well be homicidal. Twenty minutes pass and no such luck.

Rosa rolls off the chair and shuffles into the bathroom, grabbing the salt shaker and a tea cup off the breakfast table as she goes. She, of course, remembers how to make a saline solution-- you don't go through a half-dozen home piercings without understanding piercing homecare.

Not that she's been following it well, of course. Hmm. What are her options here? There isn't any gauze to be found and-- well-- she doesn't quite fancy calling up the concierge and muttering 'my nipple piercings are going to get infected if you don't get me some cotton wool'.

So the towels get sacrificed instead. Mindfang, while playing the Marquise, is unable to separate herself from pirate habits and there's a cache of daggers conveniently hidden her underwear drawer, one of which she uses to cut the towel up into useable size. She soaks each square of fabric in the teacup before settling them against her irritated breasts and stretching out on the bathroom floor.

Yep. This is glamor. Rosa snorts, shaking her hair out of her face. It needs a trim again, but she's not sure if she trusts her handiwork. Last time was okay but-- well-- maybe Mindfang can do better? She needs to ask.
Although Mindfang herself doesn't seem like she's had a trim in decades so perhaps she's not the best person to be asking. She yawns again, so widely that her jaw snaps.

Ugh. Rosa rolls her neck from side to side. How long is it going to take for her breasts to heal? The woman said at least a month (thank heavens she's not a lower, weaker life form that's more inclined to injury). But, well, she is from a particularly hardy caste, one that the woman has probably never pierced before. Last time it had to have taken barely three weeks and that was before the whole, you know... angst of adulthood thing.

Still, the last thing she wants to do is assume she'll be fine in a fortnight and let a certain someone go at it. Mostly because a certain someone might get a bit aggressive.

Rosa's half asleep when the hotel room door creaks open. She hears a few quiet footsteps and then an almost audible frown.

"Rosa?" Mindfang shouts, a little too loudly for the size of the room. "Rosa, where did you go?"

"Bathroom." She calls out, quickly, recognizing that tone of voice. Apparently even the staunchest of lectures won't sink in over the course of a night.

Mindfang sighs, gratefully. She makes her way over to the bathroom with the sharp cadence of heels on marble. Rosa stares at the doorway as Mindfang appears, fully dressed, made up and read to do something impressive. She still looks ready for a fight, however, and Rosa feels woefully inadequate.

"Oh thank fuck. What the hell are you doing?"

"Silver rings. Breasts. Pain." Rosa mutters, yawning widely. Mindfang steps over and crouches over her, giving her a ridiculously condescending glower.

"Mmmm. Very well argued, Miss..." She trails off and grimaces, taking in a sharp, angry breath. "Shit, I don't know your title."

Rosa blinks and then adjusts the fragments of washcloth that are helping to preserve her modesty. "Pardon?"

"I mean your title. I don't know it, Rosa." Mindfang seems torn between slapping sense into her or giving her a sheepish apology.

"Dolorosa?" Rosa supplies, raising an eyebrow. "As in 'it feels wrong to order someone around using such a formal name so I'm going to use the diminutive form to feel less bad about demeaning someone who once was a powerful woman so I'm going to call you Rosa instead'?"

Mindfang does not choose to acknowledge the fact that she is being insulted. It's kind of cute, actually, and Rosa resists the urge to sit up and kiss her. She's might still be a little hungover. "Yes, darling, but that's your tertiary one. Y'know. Marquise Spinneret Mindfang... Something Something Dolorosa."

"Apostate." Rosa supplies, understanding slowly. Making the decision to say it aloud is more than a little agonizing. It's what she settled upon the moment she carried her son off into the night, knowing exactly how true it was. "Apostate Demetria Dolorosa."

"That's a mouthful." Mindfang grumbles, standing up slowly. "Well. Either way, very well argued Miss Apostle."

Rosa rolls her eyes. Mindfang mimics her and takes a seat on the edge of the bath. Rosa studies her shoes, expensive looking suede boots that barely go above her ankles. They are eminently
impractical for nautical life and Rosa’s sure she purchased them just to wear during her holidays. It’s bizarrely sweet, a little weakness that’s so stereotypically feminine that it seems utterly out of place in the rest of her world.

"So." Mindfang says, awkwardly, fingers drumming against the rim of the bath. "Um. How are you feeling?"

Rosa gives her a disbelieving stare, eyebrows raised. That’s an incredibly innocuous question for someone who looks so anxious. "Hungover. And highly embarrassed."

"Well. Not exactly surprising." Mindfang shrugs, her cardigan slipping off her shoulder a little bit with the gesture. Rosa stares at the bared slice of skin, a warm silver against the darkness of her dress and hair. "You did drink an awful lot."

She sounds so ridiculously quaint when she talks like that. So utterly earnest, so-- young. Rosa wants to laugh. She doesn't. Instead she reaches out and wraps her fingers around Mindfang’s ankle, thumb stroking the softness of her shoes. Her touch leaves lines of color, leather rubbed against the grain to expose a different light.

"So. Um. I take it you remember last night?" Mindfang mutters, trying to sound sly and teasing but failing spectacularly. It’s adorable.

Rosa grimaces. She still needs to wash her hands, doesn’t she? "Yes."

"...All of it?" Mindfang asks, uncertainly, shaking her hair over one shoulder to hide her face from Rosa's gaze as best as she can.

Oh dear. Are they going to talk about this? She was hoping that the implication of 'I'm only talking about this because I am drunk' might convey the fact that she is unwilling to continue the conversation. "I might. But how would I know if I'd forgotten anything if I'd forgotten it?"

"Rosa don't do this to me. Please." Mindfang begs, shaking her hand off her shoe. "I don't need you to say anything more than that you remember."

That’s pathetic. Absolutely pathetic. But in a cute way-- a way that makes Rosa want to snuggle her half to death. Not that Mindfang’s much of a snuggler, of course. More of a smuggler really. If she wants a snuggle she'll just go speak to Marcus.

"I remember." She murmurs, sighing a little and sitting up. The blood rushes from her head downwards and she fights against a dizzy spell. "But I will not condescend to discuss that at this moment in time. Now if you would be so good as to find out if there are any adhesive bandages in the building, I would very much appreciate it."

Mindfang stares at her and whines plaintively, trying to get her attention and failing. "Rosa--"

"Medical tape and gauze also works." She amends, using Mindfang's knees to pull herself to her feet. Mindfang’s robe hangs around her like a mantle, just a little too big for a coat and too small for an overdress. It begins to slip off her and she makes nothing but the most perfunctory of efforts to stop it before the collar is at her elbows. She rolls her shoulders back and stretches her neck, slowly, staring down at Mindfang who does nothing but make an anxious noise.

Mindfang's eye level with her breasts when she pulls away her makeshift poultices. Luckily she pierces well, so what could be a painfully unpleasant sight is nothing of the sort-- just a pair of silver rings, perfectly placed in the center of her breasts and, perhaps, a little bit of angry green flesh. "Rosa, are you seriously doing this right now--"
"Please?" Rosa says, studiously pretending she doesn't have the faintest idea of what Mindfang means. "You don't want me to suffer, do you?"

"...When do I get to touch those again?" Mindfang grumbles, rising slowly and immediately invading her personal space, their bodies so close that even the most clueless of citizens would know they're intimately involved. Mindfang runs her hands down the neck of the robe and deliberately wraps it around her waist before tying it tightly and tugging hard. "I am less than amused right about now."

Rosa smiles and pushes her away, gently. "Give it a few weeks, Mistress."

"When are you going to stop calling me that?" Mindfang mutters rhetorically, making a frustrated face at her own reflection in the mirror. Rosa shrugs and doesn't say a word as Mindfang slips out of the room.

* * *

Mindfang is successful in her quest and, soon enough, Rosa's patched herself up to a level of reasonable satisfaction. She dresses slowly, head and neck aching with a deep, throbbing intensity--nothing would feel better than to quietly retreat into bed, hide under the duvet and allow Mindfang to fret over her. But her ever-present guilty conscience is building itself up to a horrible force, wave after wave of emotion refusing to be kept down no matter how much she insists that her mental infrastructure won't survive being drowned.

"You look like shit," Mindfang says, helpfully, over the edge of her tea cup. Rosa glares at her, but she pays it no heed (of course) and keeps stirring increasingly impressive amounts of sugar into her cup. "If I let you eat, are you going to make me regret it?"

Rosa lets that one slide. Only so much of a miracle can occur overnight and she's not exactly in the position to force Mindfang to do much of anything. She sinks on the couch beside her Mistress instead, making herself fit into the small space Mindfang isn't occupying. It's difficult to do, but she doesn't quite have the courage to sit close to her right now.

She feels bad. Awful, really. Rosa stares down at her hands and the smooth fabric of her dress and does her best not to let her gaze drift over to Mindfang's legs or imagine what it would feel like to rip her stockings off with her teeth.

Not like she's not allowed to do that, mind you. Mindfang would probably be incredibly pleased with that development. But Rosa's not sure she deserves to take that sort of liberty right about now.

"Rosa? Roa?" Mindfang drags her name out ridiculously, rolling the 'r' unnecessarily. She nudges Rosa's thigh with her toes and, when this doesn't garner a result she jabs her in the ribs. "Oi. Petulant slave girl. Are you ignoring me?"

Rosa shrugs. Mindfang makes a disgruntled noise and keeps poking her with her foot until Rosa stretches out on the couch beside her. There isn't very much room but she makes herself fit, burying her face into Mindfang's lap.

"Is this your way of saying no to lunch? I can't really tell, you've been pretty fucking weird lately--"

Rosa lifts her head just enough that she can meet Mindfang's eyes. Mindfang's staring down at her anxiously, her eyes bright with concern. She looks so young right now-- so different from the woman she met so many months ago. She's beginning to memorize the lines of her emotions, the ways that her face twists and flexes, how to tell when she's sincere and when she's just doing a brilliant job of faking it-- or at least beginning to figure that out.
She doesn't want to say it, but she's not quite sure what she'd do without her, now. It's nice to have someone in her life who's there because she chose to, instead of was forced into it by a trick of fate. She might hate her for being the woman who bought her but-- well-- she supposes someone had to do it eventually and all things considered, this is a pretty damn good result.

Mindfang frowns down at her and smoothes the hair off her forehead. Rosa winces at the knowledge that her hair must now look absolutely awful.

"I'm sorry I was mean to you." She whispers, hoarsely, valiantly attempting to ignore how brilliant it feels to have an ice cold hand on her aching head. "It wasn't necessary and you deserve better."

Her hand stills mid-pet and her face freezes. Rosa's not entirely sure what any of this means since she is, of course, trying to be mature right now and forge the foundation of an actual relationship.

"...Don't. Just. Don't, Rosa." Mindfang mutters, sniffing dismissively.

"But--" Mindfang clamps her hand over Rosa's mouth before she can finish her protest. She tastes like hand cream and the residue of perfume oil and it isn't at all pleasant. She regrets licking her almost immediately-- mostly because why the hell would Mindfang be upset about being licked? She's a pirate. She's been through a lot worse.

"I'm not stupid enough to pretend that I didn't deserve it." Mindfang mutters, squeezing the back of Rosa's neck-- it's meant to be a gentle, reassuring gesture but Rosa shudders a little all the same. "We have to even out the playing field eventually."

Rosa glares up at her, not wanting to destroy another fragment of her dignity by attempting to talk from behind Mindfang's hand. Eventually she withdraws and Rosa does her best to look just as pissed as she feels. "I don't want to do that. I don't think my treating you poorly is going to make our relationship any more successful."

"It'll make me feel better." Mindfang mutters, sighing loudly and throwing herself onto the couch back. "Just. Don't make yourself a martyr. You've done enough of that."

Rosa ignores the reference, as well as the flurry of anxious questions regarding just how much Mindfang knows about her history. "How will that make you feel better?"

"Because you're right. I'm just lying to myself. I've spent the past month letting myself believe that you might wake up one day and decide that it doesn't matter that you're my slave and that our relationship is fucked over, we could still have something!" Mindfang hisses, her voice suddenly vitriolic with anger. She doesn't move at all-- doesn't make a single angry gesture but, well, Rosa feels threatened all the same.

"Vienna--" Rosa tries to stop her before things get any worse. She doesn't want to do this either. She doesn't want to think about any of this whatsoever.

"Because I've never cared about anyone so desperately before and I'm so fucking pissed that it had to be you because I can't ever have you! No matter what! There's nothing that can fix the fact that in the back of your head you're always going to be wondering if this is what you really want!"

"Damnit Vienna, who cares! You're a fake pirate and I'm an awful mother. And it's certainly not a good foundation to have but--"

Rosa breaks off and groans, loudly, unsure of where her argument is going. They're both awful fakes? Neither of them are, actually, real people? "Oh fuck, I know exactly what you mean."

"You just swore and you aren't even drunk, that's how bad this is." Mindfang mutters, sadly,
slumping over Rosa and frowning. Her hair tumbles down over her shoulders and brushes against Rosa's nose. "I really do like you, you know. Not just because I own you. And-- I don't know. I wouldn't have encountered you unless I bought you so I can't apologize for that. You'd probably be dead by now if I hadn't."

"Very true on all accounts." Rosa concedes, reaching up to idly tug on one of her curls an watch it spring back into place. "And you were very intimidating. Lots of growling and threats."

"See? See?"

"And there isn't any way to get around the fact that you own me. There isn't a single way to justify that. I can't say that I think that's okay because this is a special case-- you might have been trying to find me but we both know Marcus just brought me home because he thought I'd amuse you for a few weeks before you abandoned me somewhere."

"In my defense, I would have given you an ample settlement and made sure you were well set up in whatever harbor I ditched you at."

"That's so kind, thank you. I cannot believe your generosity."

"Thanks, Rosa, you're really making me feel better. I'm not trying to say I'm not awful but-- I guess-- I just--"

Mindfang takes Rosa's face in her hands, the gesture carefully gentle. She strokes the skin of her face idly and Rosa feels her skin go cold at her touch. "You make me happy. Like actually happy, not happy in a 'look at how badass I am, I am so great' way like usual. And I most certainly do not regard you as my slave-- Don't give me that look, I'm bossy and possessive with almost everyone I date."

"There really isn't any way to justify this quagmire."

"Quagmire. Good word." Mindfang muses, wrinkling her nose. "But I don't like you being right. I can't pretend that I don't deserve your mistrust or anxiety and I certainly can't pretend that I don't understand why you're so hesitant to love me."

Rosa makes a soft, sad noise and reaches up to squeeze her hand. "I never said I couldn't."

"Yes, but-- I just-- I really want you to now." Mindfang says, pathetically, closing her eyes. "And I know that it won't happen until I accept that it might not happen and-- It's just-- This is so awful."

Rosa groans and struggles to sit up. Mindfang helps her, eventually, and Rosa throws herself around her. Mindfang hugs her back and they both fall silent.

"We can't even do the 'let's just be friends thing'." Rosa mumbles into Mindfang's neck, hiding the urge to cry with a wave of appreciation for her perfume. "I like you too much."

"Me too."

They go quiet once more and, eventually, Mindfang goes weak in her arms. She doesn't start crying like Rosa half expects when she feels the tremors rocking down her Captain's back. But she does snivel a bit.

"Perhaps... we can acknowledge that our situation is unique and, while not at all acceptable to the civilized world can be accepted by the two of us because I'm a rebellious nun with a pirate fetish and you're a pirate with an extensive art collection?" Rosa ventures, slowly, aware of the fact that she
sounds like a moron but not wanting to deal with that because *damn it* Mindfang's right about one thing, they *are* happy. It's a horrible, bizarre, twisted happiness but it's still enough for her and she's going to keep it.

Mindfang pulls out of her embrace and lifts her head to give her a pensive smile. She twines her fingers with Rosa's and drops them off the edge of the couch. "I like that. Especially the part about the pirate fetish."

"What! You're incredibly attractive! There isn't a troll alive that could look at you and go 'oh goodness me, I do not wish to have intercourse with her whatsoever'." Rosa laughs, pressing her forehead against Mindfang's neck to hide the fact that she's gone an awfully vivid green. "I broke an almost 60 year-long streak of abstinence for you, you know."

"In public, too." Mindfang purrs huskily, crooking her eyebrows in what is undoubtedly an attempt at innuendo. It is, unfortunately, rather ruined by the fact that she's still fighting not to cry. "I think that should get me some sort of award, shouldn't it?"

"I think you already got that last night."

Mindfang kisses her. Rosa kisses her back, desperately clinging to her neck. Her lips slip against Mindfang's and there's a painful gash of fangs against her lower lip but she doesn't stop, even when Mindfang makes an unhappy noise at the taste of blood.

Nothing wrong with a little bit of blood in Rosa's opinion. Nothing at all. Mindfang is easily dissuaded from her discomfort and pulls Rosa close, making small, pleased noises against her lips.

When they finally break apart, they're both breathless. Rosa slumps against her and Mindfang cuddles her close. "...You're my favorite. Don't let anyone else tell you that you aren't."

Rosa laughs. "You're only saying that because I'm willing to sleep with you now."

"Well." Mindfang considers the point while Rosa nuzzles her neck predatorily. She has a very nice neck and Rosa's beginning to get quite fond of it. "Maybe a little?"

* * *

They spend far too much of the afternoon in the same exact place doing the same exact thing--angsting over the exact same issue and doing far too much kissing. Not that there is such a thing but--well--there's probably a better use for their time.

Eventually, however, Rosa's desire to *eat something* overtakes her desire to let Mindfang prove just how fond she is of her.

They head off-site for lunch at Mindfang's insistence, winding their way to a restaurant just a half-mile away. They get a table outside to make Mindfang happy; she's more than happy to bask in the sun while Rosa retreats to the shade of the overhang and looks around them, anxiously, for someone who might know who she is.

Their meal is surprisingly uneventful. The food it good but nothing too fascinating and neither of them drink more than a glass of wine. They talk mostly about books which is fairly normal--Mindfang makes scores of recommendations that Rosa is quick to remind her cannot be fulfilled unless a certain someone buys them and, of course, Mindfang scrawls out a shopping list and promises to do so.

It isn't until they finish eating that the conversation takes a sudden turn for the worse. Considering
that they've spent the past few days analyzing the nuances of their life together, she shouldn't be surprised but, well, Mindfang is anything but conventional.

"So I think it's about time we had a formal conversation about sex." Mindfang declares, shortly after their waiter brings them more bread. He's not even entirely out of earshot, poor man; he stops in his tracks but to his credit does not turn around to stare.

Rosa keeps her calm. "Pardon me? I'm not entirely sure what you're driving at. Is there some issue with my performance?"

Mindfang gives her a bemused smirk across the table, eyebrows flicking up her forehead. "No, of course not. What could be wrong with that? We've had sex once. I mean twice, but I was the only one to get off that time so I don't really count it as real."

"Then I don't see what the problem is. Let's not talk about this. Can we go back to you using big words and making me feel stupid?"

This earns her an unamused snort.

"I don't want to be that woman but," Mindfang taps her fork against her plate and Rosa winces at each clink of silver on china. "You have to know that I'm not capable of being entirely... moderate."

The way she shapes her words implies that she means something more than what she's saying, voice heavy with entendre of a decidedly mature nature.

Rosa meditatively spreads butter across a piece of bread, as if making sure the distribution of dairy to grains is seamless has become her new life goal. She's talking about sex. Rosa can tell that much-- she's untried not naive. But pretending that she knows anything about sex is a little too-- well-- intimidating. "I would be lying if I behaved as if I understood you."

Mindfang doesn't seem particularly annoyed by the answer, but rather quietly resigned. Rosa would feel guilty about spending most of her time playing the innocent virgin, but it's rather hard to do when Mindfang so clearly enjoys trying to teach her all about the facts of life.

She crosses her legs and sits back in her chair, giving Rosa an appraising stare. "Look, darling. I run my ship with a tight fist. I make sure that nothing and no one is ever out of place. I like being in charge. A lot. Quite a lot. Do you understand what I am implying right now? I need to know if that sort of behavior is going to upset you--"

Yes, this is definitely about sex. Rosa sighs and raises her eyebrows. She's hungry. Very hungry. She shouldn't be; they're finishing off dessert, she's had a lot of wine and there's still bread left. Can she get away with stealing food from Mindfang? Normally, no, but at the moment she's rather sure Mindfang will tolerate anything in the hope of being somewhat forgiven. "I'm not asking you to change our intimate life. I'm asking you to respect me."

"Yes, but does that mean that I'm not on top anymore? Because that's not going to work so well. I've tried. I'm awful at being submissive, believe me, I make it unpleasant for everyone involved." She raises her eyebrows. "Come now, Annora, you have to know what vein my hedonistic desires lie in."

Mindfang's implying something. Not very subtly. She would like to say that she doesn't know what in the world Mindfang means by that but-- well-- she's read enough terrible romance novels that she can make a few assumptions. Whether or not she's correct about these assumptions is, of course,
debatable. But somehow she's sure that a potential pirate ravishment scenario is up for grabs and she would like that.

After all, there has to be a reason for those pirate stereotypes and, well, Mindfang does seem like the type of woman who would very much enjoy tying someone up and lording herself over them. And Rosa's not sure if she'd mind that, even after the number of arguments they've had in the past few days about Mindfang not properly empowering her. However, which answer is going to get her the pirate ravishment scenario that doesn't actually require things being... dicey isn't entirely clear.

So she does what usually works best. Plays stupid. Rosa stares, wide-eyed, doing her best to seem utterly bewildered by the reference to Mindfang's kinks. "Pardon me?"

"Oh fuck me, seriously? Seriously Rosa? Do you really need me to explain this?" Mindfang looks like she's torn between laughing and crying. "You can't pull the innocent virgin face anymore, I know you aren't one. You've seen how many riding crops I own-- I don't exactly keep a horse on my ship, sweetheart. And I keep a pair of handcuffs under my mattress-- I know you know that."

She does know that. And she had been wondering about that. It's rather gratifying to have that confirmed, actually. Ten points to Rosa for knowing something about sex. That definitely deserves cake.

"Well, it sounds like you're telling me that you're willing to respect me so long as I'll let you shove me around in bed." Rosa states, slowly, raising her eyebrows.

"Well, I wouldn't phrase it quite like that," Mindfang mumbles, coughing as she's caught in an uncomfortable implication. Which she certainly. "But yes. It's nothing personal, I just really enjoy being in charge. In an, um, sexual context. And in real life, I suppose. But if that's not something you're, well, interested in, I think we should talk about it. Even if you are interested in... this sort of thing we should talk about it because reasons."

There's hundreds of reasons. Rosa wonders which one she's thinking of. The questionable moral ground that surrounds a slave being tied up and beaten for sexual gratification by the woman who owns her being the most major one. Because, well, that's a tricky one. Especially when she can do the whole, well... mind thing.

But Rosa, despite all the frustrations she's let fly recently, trusts Mindfang not to hurt her, or-- well-- take advantage of her in that particular fashion. She seems to be adamant about that being an inviolable line.

"Rosa-- I mean-- I just-- I want to make sure we're both happy. And it's not entirely fair of me to have expectations of you in bed."

"Oh for the love of-- Vienna, sex is the last thing I'm concerned about in our relationship. As far as I'm concerned you can do whatever you want with me because I won't know any better."

"Rosa--" Mindfang seems horribly offended which, really, wasn't the intended effect. Damn. This is even more uncomfortable than telling her she's a self-involved moron.

"I realized the moment I said it that I shouldn't have said that. I just-- really. I don't have any complaints so far." Rosa raises her hands in surrender and bows her head slightly. "You've been quite the gentlewoman. Very polite, really. No complaints. No aspersions against your sexual abilities whatsoever."

Mindfang snorts and makes a face. "That's not a standard I intended to set, you know. I'm usually
more of a walk into the room, shove you into the wall and do what I feel like to you sort of girl. And then keep you at my mercy for as long as I see fit."

Rosa gives her a coy smile and reaches out to trace the outline of her calf with her toes. Mindfang jolts a little. "Oh, so you mean you're usually better at being a pirate?"

"I'm assuming this constitutes consent to that sort of thing, not just you belittling my career choices because I don't know what you mean when you say 'pirate' in a sexual context."

"What do you think I mean?"

"Honestly, I have no idea. Amputated limbs? Parrots? Ocean sex? I don't know, Rosa. As a troll who happens to be a pirate I'm really into kinky sex. Is that what you're getting at?"

"I don't know what I'm getting at."

"Rosa please don't tell me you're being shy about this. You cannot repeatedly imply that you might be interested in a little more than your standard sexual relationship and then refuse to talk about it. Not to mention that you just got me off under a table in front of my friends."

"This is hardly appropriate public conversation--"

"We are having sex. We have had sex, we are going to have sex and I am not going to do anything more than the minimum required to get you off unless I know I've got your consent since you clearly have issues with my not acknowledging your feelings."

Rosa groans. Why now. Whyyyy now. "I think there is a big difference between what I am curious about and what I might actually enjoy and I'm not going to commit to anything without knowing that!"

"Well. I'm not going to do anything fun and exciting until I know you're okay with it."

"You're being difficult." Rosa grouses, pulling her shawl more tightly around her to hide her face.

Mindfang narrows her eyes and growls a little. "No, I'm worried about traumatizing you."

"I don't know what to say! I-- I just-- I just-- I lost my virginity three days ago, what do you want from me!?" Rosa leans in close and snarls, slapping the tabletop. Mindfang looms in just as much but with a gloriously predatory smirk.

"...Fine. We'll talk about it later." Mindfang glares darkly as she pours herself another glass of wine. "But I know you're not as innocent as you're pretending to be, don't try to pull one over on me."

"Well, it's worked for over three months now, so I don't see any reason why that should change." Rosa mutters, crossing her arms and pulling herself away to sulk.

Mindfang chokes.

* * *

They return to the hotel at Rosa's request; she can't look at sunlight without wanting to gouge her eyes out and Mindfang, while condescendingly amused, perfectly understands. It's only five-forty five but Mindfang seems perfectly content to curl up on a couch with a book.

Rosa crawls back into bed with a bag of ice on her face to try to ward off the worst of her hangover headache, since painkillers don't seem to be doing it. Her eyes are aching and the cold helps
somewhat. She can't sleep but it helps to lie in the quiet. Between the crashing of distant waves and
the sound of quietly flipping pages she can almost pretend she's back on board the Widow.

She wants to be asleep but remembered fragments of the past arguments won't quite fade. How much
does she actually know about the woman reading on the couch nearby? They know each other well
enough that they had a public conversation about their sexual preferences. But Rosa can't think of a
single personal fact about her that isn't obvious to anyone who's spoken to her.

There's the obvious, of course: favorite color blue, likes repetitions of eights, collection of remarkably
artistic compasses, enjoys reading sonnets, has a few artistic pursuits--

"How long have you been drawing for?" Rosa ventures, quietly.

Mindfang stops reading for a moment-- Rosa can tell when she hears the pages flop together as her
finger becomes a bookmark. "I picked it up when I'd been sailing for about a decade. It became quite
evident that being able to draw my own maps would be essential to establishing my own fleet."

"Oh. That sounds... interesting." Rosa says, lamely. She doesn't understand half of what she says
when she gets excited about intellectual things. She knows she's not stupid; she's clever at the very
least but Mindfang is in a completely different league. "Do you draw a lot?"

She hears a low laugh. "Only when I feel it's necessary to augment my journals, nowadays. Or
sketch out a particularly nice building. Marcus is a very talented cartographer-- that's why I stole him.
He draws the countries and I do the ornamentation bits along the edges."

"That's nice."

"I'm a bit more preferential to the music side of the arts but we can't quite get a piano on the ship."

"I didn't know that. You're quite the renaissance woman."

"You should rest."

"...Sorry." Rosa wraps her arms around a pillow and adjusts the icepack over her face. "I just-- I feel
as if I'm failing you by not knowing these things."

Mindfang sighs, loudly. She rises off the couch with a clicking of heels, and wanders over to the
windows to throw the curtains shut. "Go to sleep, Rosa. Worry about me later."

Rosa isn't satisfied with that idea at all, but she closes her eyes. Her nap is brief and does nothing to
alleviate her pounding headache, but it's something. Mindfang has already departed for the evening--
there's a note pinned to her dress that informs her that Mindfang has gone to dinner with the friends
she encountered the night before.

Rosa silently thanks her for not doing her the disservice of being invited along; she's exhausted, her
hair is a mess and she smells funny. Ugh. Awful, even. She should really go take a bath.

But her hunger gets the best of her, and soon enough she's picking up the phone and spinning the
dials to get the number for Marcus's room. He picks up on the fourth ring.

"Yes?" He snaps. Rosa, despite herself, laughs. They make perfunctory plans for dinner-- that is to
say Marcus agrees to order dinner and have it brought to her room.

Marcus slips into the room without knocking and flops onto the couch. Rosa joins him momentarily.
They eat relatively quietly, Rosa doing almost all of the talking while Marcus listens, giving her quiet affirmations that she's not awful, that she's not being too demanding, nor does Mindfang hate her whatsoever.

"I suggest you get yourself a hobby, sweetheart." Is Marcus's only real advice to her. "Or use emotional blackmail during sex to learn what you can."

Rosa groans and pours herself a cup of coffee. "Can I do that? I don't think I'm good enough in bed to distract her from her emotional problems."

"Aww, baby, you'll get there." Marcus pats her leg reassuringly-- and then frowns, his eyes narrowing. "...She's not making you do anything you don't want to, is she? Do I need to hit her? Because I have and will hit her--"

She blushes, bright green, and busies herself with preparing her coffee to her personal specifications so that she doesn't have to meet Marcus's eyes. "She's been quite the gentlewoman. I have no complaints."

"You're glowing my dear. I take it she's living up to her reputation?" He takes her coffee cup before she can even take a sip, curling his hands around it.

Rosa sniffs. "I hardly think that would be very ladylike conversation."

"Well. Just don't be afraid to punch her in the boob, Nora. Get her hard and it'll wreck the mood."

That might actually be very good advice. She'll have to file that for later use. "Thank you, Marcus, I'm sure that will be eminently useful."

He might not be the most helpful Moirail on the face of the planet. But at least he's trying. Rosa snuggles into him and smiles. They spend a few more hours talking, cozied up together before the fire. He only leaves when Rosa insists she wants to take a bath before Mindfang gets back and most likely executes a less-than innocent plan for their evening.

Not that she wants to seem overeager, of course. That would be-- well-- unseemly to say the least. But that doesn't change the fact that she is quite curious to see what Mindfang might have planned.

Marcus leaves her a mostly-empty bottle of wine and a kiss to the cheek.

"Be careful, darling. Don't let yourself get... taken in by anything. She's got decades of experience on you-- don't try to catch up."

Rosa doesn't really know what she means. But she nods an affirmation all the same, and squeezes his hand.

* * *

His words hang with her as gets to her bath, filling the tub and even going so far as to add bubbles. She can't remember the last time she's taken a ridiculously frilly bath and, perhaps, it's about time. The water's hot enough that her skin goes a pale shade of green when she slips under and opaque enough that she can't see hardly any of herself.

It's nice. Rosa sinks down to her ears and revels in the feel of the heat forcing her muscles to relax. The heat helps divest her of the rest of her hangover; her headache begins to recede and the worst of her neck pain starts to ebb.
Water is nice. Very nice. Painkillers might not be the most helpful but this certainly is. She languishes in the water, for once forcing herself to think instead of numb her brain.

She doesn't quite know what do with her thoughts, of course. They're mostly of a sexual nature and, while she feels decided more permitted to explore them as of late, the question of what to decide is as oblique as always.

Is this a good idea? Any of this? Was it really at all intelligent to give in? Should she have held out longer? Should she have held out forever? The correct answer is yes. Entrusting yourself to the woman who bought you is an awfully stupid thing to do.

But she'd been so gentle. So caring. Mindfang had spent an entire evening more or less worshipping her. She's never had anyone pay so much attention to her before. Not even in a platonic context.

She didn't mind that at all. It was, in fact, one of the best things she's ever experienced. It certainly did wonders for her sense of self-worth, not to mention her trust in how much Mindfang truly wants her around.

Rosa absently rubs her hand across her leg, her face prickling as she begins to remember things that are more enticing than even a hot bath. Like the feeling of Mindfang's fingers digging into her skin while they kiss or the sensation of her breath down Rosa's neck as they twine together across their bed--

The thought of her alone is enough to get her excited; her face goes a brighter shade of green and her nook twitches. Oh dear. It shouldn't be this easy to get her excited. After a good 50 or so years of abstinence, however, she feels as if she might have earned the right to enjoy herself.

Her hand slips higher up her leg, water sloshing around her slightly. She shouldn't be doing this. Rosa forces herself to open her eyes and stare up at the ceiling just to bring herself back to reality. She really shouldn't be doing this.

Then again... is there really any harm in it? She glances towards the door, nervously. No one's there, of course; Marcus said he was headed out for the evening and she's fairly certain he's not about to return unannounced. Mindfang will probably be gone for a few more hours-- dinner for her is usually a four hour affair, at least it is when she's got 'professional' work to be done.

No one is going to catch her. No one at all. She's perfectly safe. Rosa moves her hand a little higher, just until she can brush her fingers against her nook. Rosa's not entirely sure what to do with herself now; she hesitantly moves her hand in closer. It doesn't do anything much.

Rosa huffs, and takes a deep breath to steady her nerves. She's being silly. It's just her body. Nothing too remarkable about that. Working her fingers against the tip of her bulge is difficult-- not physically, of course, but overcoming her own brain is almost impossible.

The arousal is fuzzy at first, a newly ephemeral sensation that Rosa's wholly unused to. She slinks lower in the water and drops her head back, closing her eyes. The smell of roses in the bubble bath floods her senses as she takes a deep breath through her nose. Okay. She can do this. She really can do this.

What would Mindfang do right now? She curls her fingers into herself and begins to rub against her nook. The intensity of the arousal grows quickly as she starts to think about the hundred and one things she'd be struggling to process if it were Mindfang in the bath with her: the feel of her cold skin against her back, the smell of her perfume, her yowling as she yanks her own hair trying to sit up-- forgetting that she'd trapped it behind her.
...This is better than expected. Far less stressful, at the least. She doesn't need to worry about her partner, for one and for another thing she's not obligated to panic about what's going on--

She relaxes a little more and moans. This is nice. Very nice. Lovely even.

"Well well what's this?" Mindfang purrs, her voice as thick as crushed velvet curtains as she slips her fingers along the edge of the doorway, leaning against it to strike a sultry pose. She's got a full glass of wine in her right hand and swirls it around predatorily while staring Rosa down. "Oh my, my, my. If I'm not mistaken you're not being very good at all."

Rosa doesn't know how she missed the sound of the door being unlocked, opened or closed. She also doesn't know how she missed Mindfang walking in; when she opens her eyes, Mindfang's boots are the first thing she sees and those heels have to have made noise.

But despite the incredulity of it all, she didn't notice her come in. Which under any other circumstance, wouldn't be an issue whatsoever because she'd be knitting or sleeping or reading but--no-- of course.

Of course, the one time she does something awful is the time that she doesn't hear Mindfang coming.

"Vienna--" She begins, but then realizes she's not at all sure what she'll even say beyond your standard begging. "Vienna, please--"

"No need to explain dear. I'm an intelligent woman. I can tell what's going on here." She swans across the room in wonderfully elegant strides, dress swinging around her. Rosa sinks deeper in her bathwater, determined not to be physically compared to Mindfang in full evening regalia.

In a single deft movement she snags the leg of the vanity stool and drags it over to the foot of the tub. She settles onto the edge of it and elegantly crosses her ankles together. Rosa stares at her, blankly, carefully schooling her face into an expression of 'this is nothing more than an awkward breakfast conversation'. Mindfang blinks back, slowly, but with quite a bit more panache.

She's painfully attractive when she smirks like that. Eyes going more vividly blue with arousal,

"Well?" She asks, archly. "Don't let me be a bother. Carry on."

"...You can't be serious." Rosa says, thickly, making a move to climb out of the water. Mindfang growls immediately, pulling her lips back to show her fangs.

She kicks at the edge of the tub and swishes the wine around in her glass, making a face at the sediment within. She seems utterly at her leisure and more than a little bored with the situation. Rosa would be offended if she couldn't see the anxious twitch in her ankle. "Go on then. Get back to it."

"No."

"No?" Mindfang says with mock shock, her eyes going wide in a way that remarkably distorts the eyeliner around them. "Did you just tell me no?"

"Not with you watching me." Rosa mumbles, slipping as low into the water as she can without drowning. Oh dear she's intimidating, so intimidating-- if she's not careful she's going to do exactly what Mindfang says without even trying to question it. "I can't--"

"Why not? Not like it's anything I haven't seen. We've had sex, darling." She says this with a beautiful scoff, sipping from her wineglass like this is nothing more than a book club.
"This is different," Rosa insists and closes her eyes. She finally slips beneath the water's surface and glares up at Mindfang, only her eyes looming out.

"How? How is it different? It's not my hand between your legs?"

"Yes." Rosa splashes as she leans in and slips a hand beneath the water's surface. "Get away!"

Mindfang sighs, grumpily, through her pursed lips and bends over to set her wineglass on the ground. The crystal sounds out against the marble with a soft clink and it's a testament to Rosa's stifling anxiety how loud it is.

"You're so utterly useless at this, you know," Mindfang mutters, slinking across the room to kneel beside the tub. She slips a hand into the water, her bracelet clinking against the porcelain. Her fingers swish around in the water like a sleepy stingray. Mindfang's intention is clear enough and, eventually, Rosa feels her fingers ghost against her thigh. Rosa whines, anxiously, and presses her knees together as tightly as she can, shaking her head.

"Shhh, shhh," Mindfang soothes, stroking her neck. Rosa flinches at her touch, expecting something far more harsh. "Come along, darling. Don't you want to show me how good you are?"

Rosa shakes her head again. The water sloshes around and Mindfang makes an anxious noise as some of it splashed onto the tile. "Please don't--"

"Why?" Mindfang presses her face into Rosa's throat and exhales heavily and Rosa's skin twitches and then begins to glow with aroused warmth. "You've already been beneath my fingers--"

"Vienna--" She groans, her voice hitching to ear-shattering heights. "Vienna you can't--"

Rosa feels Mindfang's fingers curl around the back of her hand beneath the water. She makes a half-hearted attempt to escape because-- well-- anything more will result in Mindfang seeing her naked and that won't help the situation at all. "I'm just going to lend you a hand, darling. That's all."

"Aren't you angry?" Rosa asks, quietly, her body going painfully tense as she waits for an answer.

"No. No, I'm not angry." Mindfang murmurs, softly, hand swishing around in the bubbles. "Darling girl, why would I be angry?"

Rosa bats her hand away, gently, beneath the water. Mindfang keeps at her, insistently, muttering angry chirps into her ear. "You seem mad."

"I'm mad in a 'I just endured three months of abstaining from sexual intercourse with you and you're masturbating instead of waiting a few hours for me to come home' sort of way'." Mindfang grumbles, head-butting her and trilling a little more affectionately. "Not mad in a 'I'm going to tie you to my bed and leave you there to suffer' sort of way."

"Knowing you as well as I do, Captain, I'm reasonably sure both situations end with you and I having sex." Rosa knows she shouldn't say it. It's pressing the bounds of Mindfang's self-control. But-- well-- she can't resist.

"Damn right you-- did you just call me Captain?"

Rosa can't help feeling proud at how excited Mindfang sounds. She relaxes a little and nuzzles into her Mistress. Mindfang moans against her throat until she drops her head back. Immediately her neck is smothered in kisses, hot and wet against her already damp skin. "...Should I not?"
"The second I finish getting you off we're having sex," Mindfang purrs, dragging her teeth along the line of emeralds in her ear. "You're going to be quite a handful once you get your act together, aren't you?"

"When I get my act together?" Rosa scoffs, hoping that she'll be able to distract Mindfang long enough that she'll forget what she's planning to do. Such is not the case. All that she's done is renew Mindfang's determination.

"Don't play stupid, Pet, we both know you're far too clever for your level of attractiveness." Mindfang's teeth prick at her skin without any of the gentleness Rosa's used to. "You're going to get yourself off-- I'm going to help-- and then I am going to have you fuck my brains out."

"You are angry." Rosa mumbles, closing her eyes and squeezing her thighs together even tighter. "I don't want you touching me when you're angry."

Mindfang trails her fingers down Rosa's spine. "Do you think I should be mad? Do you think you deserve to be punished for this?"

"...No." Rosa doesn't respond quickly enough for Mindfang to be convinced. Mindfang grins. Rosa feels it against her neck and twitches, the movement sending ripples throughout the water. "No. I'm glad you're not angry."

"No you're not," Mindfang says, delighted. She finally succeeds in capturing Rosa's hand, clamping down on her wrist so hard that it feels like she's got steel for bones. She doesn't attempt to resist any longer. "You want me to punish you, don't you?"

Rosa scrabbles her feet against the bottom of the tub, trying to keep Mindfang away from her body. "No--"

"Don't lie," Mindfang chides, her voice soft and horribly pleased. "You naughty girl, I can tell when you're lying."

"Vienna--" She tries, once more. "Vienna-- I don't like this--"

"Spread them." She growls, twisting her free hand through Rosa's hair and yanking her head back until she's staring up at Mindfang's face. Her eyes are wide and intensely emotional; Rosa's drawn in despite herself. "Spread them now or so help me I will drag you out of this bath, bend you over the dining room table and spank that gorgeous ass of yours so green you'll be mistaken for a basil plant."

She does as told. Weird metaphors aside, there isn't even an attempt to question her orders. Her knees fall apart the moment Mindfang completes the syllables. Damnit. Why is she so biddable? This isn't useful whatsoever--

And that's when Mindfang makes her move. She slips Rosa's hand back between her legs and, before she knows it, her own fingers are being forced against her nook.

"Now, that wasn't so hard, was it?" Mindfang says, slyly. "You're going to have to help me out now, Pet. Can you do that?"

"No." Rosa gasps as Mindfang works her fingers against her nook. Mindfang isn't afraid of what she's going to discover, unlike Rosa herself who was-- well-- more than a little hesitant. Mindfang doesn't skirt around or wait for any reaction before she begins to feel around.

"See, I'm usually more of a buildup sort of girl. I like the anticipation, the exhilaration of waiting for the fun part," Mindfang murmurs, conversationally. "But I never say no to a bit of a direct approach. 
Hell, if you're offering to fuck me I'm going to take you up on it!

She laughs as she works Rosa's fingertips against the folds of her nook. Rosa trembles and struggles not to yank her hand out of Mindfang's grasp. Mindfang can feel her tension, of course and soothes her with a quiet noise.

Rosa knows that she should not be excited by this. She should not be a split decision away from throwing herself out of the tub, crashing to the floor and begging Mindfang to take her now, to do what she wants with her-- to make her remember nothing more than the fact that Mindfang is her universe. For the space of a few minutes she doesn't want to remember anything more than the insatiable pleasure of having Mindfang's skin melding with her own.

Does it mean that Mindfang will respect her less if she allows her to manipulate her like this? Rosa moans as she feels Mindfang work her own fingertips against her. Rosa can feel Mindfang's knuckles against her inner thigh, rings digging into her flesh in a way that's more than a little exhilarating. Mindfang breathes against her neck raggedly and Rosa futiley attempts not to be aroused by it. It's almost too much-- the water, the breath, her touch, her own hand--

"Pay attention," Mindfang growls, biting at her collarbone. She's exploring again. But this time it's not with such a purpose. She's moving slowly and making small noises of question against Rosa's skin.

"How's that?" Mindfang murmurs when she hits someplace that makes Rosa's knees twitch under the water, her breath taking on an entirely new cadence. "Do you like that?"

"Maybe." She growls, through gritted teeth, tossing her head back. Mindfang's forced to lunge backwards to avoid having her stomach punctured by Rosa's horns, but instead of complaining just laughs.

"Playing hard to get when I'm trying to show you how to get yourself off isn't going to do you many favors. Fuck, Rosa, you're already pretty far behind on the curve here, take the extra credit where it's offered, huh?"

"I don't understand--" Rosa gasps, biting her lip to keep herself from screaming a little as Mindfang makes her fingers approach just the right place on her nook. This would be incredible if Mindfang would just do it herself instead of making her do something.

"Yeahhhhhhh, you totally like that," Mindfang coos, grinning. "And you should understand what you like, you ridiculous woman."

"I don't-- no-- no don't move." Rosa's voice breaks when Mindfang's fingers slip away. "No-- I liked that part--"

Mindfang kisses her jaw and smiles, too sweetly. "Now, now, Pet. You're not in charge right now."

Mindfang begins to trace increasingly smaller circles around the tip of her bulge. Rosa struggles against her halfheartedly against her; it's more of a gesture than any actual attempt to free herself because dear heavens between the lips searching out the sweet spot on her neck and her fingers being forced to do the same between her legs, things are rapidly spiraling out of focus. She twists her neck so she can press her face into Mindfang's shoulder and, thankfully, is not rejected.

"Go on sweetheart," Mindfang urges, softly, using her free hand to brush Rosa's sweaty hair off her forehead. "Let yourself go. Don't worry about me."

"Do it yourself." Rosa grouses. Mindfang laughs.
"You started it, Pet, what did you think was going to happen?"

"Nothing." Rosa yelps as Mindfang keeps working over the same spot. She sucks in a pained breath and, before Mindfang can react quickly enough to pull away, she's sunk her teeth into her neck. It's nothing like the playful bites Mindfang's fond of leaving-- it's a legitimate bite, her jaws locking together as her orgasm takes over her.

Mindfang is the one who screeches; Rosa's own scream is hidden in Mindfang's flesh. A combination of clinging to the bathtub rims and the incredibly helpful anchor of Mindfang's neck keeps her from thrashing enough to flood their bathroom.

Her mouth begins to fill with blood-- Rosa hardly notices, but Mindfang certainly seems to-- she's howling for all she's worth. She pulls her hands out of the waters and begins to desperately tug at Rosa's horns.

The moment she comes back to herself she pulls her fangs from Mindfang's neck. Her blood is bizarrely refreshing for its chilled state and she doesn't hesitate before swallowing.

"What the fuck, Rosa? What the actual fuck was that for!?"

She laps the blood off her lips and teeth before replying. "You shouldn't have put your neck there."

Her heart is pounding, of course; she's torn between panicking over the fact that she just did actual damage or simply basking in the afterglow. She settles for basking and pondering the fact that Mindfang is tasty. Is that a bad thing to be thinking? She's pretty sure it is.

"You naughty girl." Mindfang scolds, but she's smirking all the same-- even as she covers her still-bleeding neck with her hand. "I'm going to have to get very strict with you, aren't I?"

"I left the bandages on the nightstand," Rosa murmurs absently. "I didn't get the carotid but you still need to be careful."

Mindfang ignores this quite sensible advice in favor of getting decidedly grumpy. She grabs Rosa by the horn and yanks. The threat of further pain is enough to get her out of the bath; within seconds she's stumbling after her into their bedroom.

"I need a towel--"

"You need to fix my neck." Mindfang grouses, sinking into the armchair that faces the fire. In the firelight she's the very picture of glamor; her dress gleams with a subtle sparkle and the flawless diamonds in her ears glimmer just as intensely as her eyes.

Rosa stares, questioningly. "Mistress?"

"I'm not going to ask nicely again, Pet; you're going to patch up my neck and then we're going to decide what I'm going to do about you." She isn't joking. She's smiling but it's a sinister expression, her eyes glinting deviously from beneath her ridiculously expressive eyebrows. It's attractive.

Unfortunately attractive, considering that she's not entirely sure how good of an idea it is to give into Mindfang's more power-based sexual whims until she feels as if she's established her significance in their relationship. But she's so attractive; all Rosa wants to do is tackle her and move things along.

"..." Rosa turns, silently, and retrieves the medical supplies from where she left them. She reaches for the robe lying across their bed but Mindfang's quick to growl so she gives up the attempt.
She returns to Mindfang's side and holds out the bandages. Mindfang does not take them and instead raises her eyebrows; she settles herself into the armchair as if it's her throne, crossing her legs with slow, deliberate movements.

"No. I said you will do it." She repeats, calmly and Rosa swallows anxiously. The moment she gets close enough for Mindfang to touch her she goes incredibly wary. What if this isn't her flirting? What if she's actually upset? What if this is actually a prelude to her being blindfolded and thrown into a jail cell for the rest of her life--

"Please don't hurt me." She begs, her voice hitching as she suddenly becomes absolutely convinced that Mindfang is going to snap her neck then throw her down the laundry chute. "I didn't mean to-- your neck was just there and--"

Mindfang rolls her eyes and reaches up to cup her face in her hands. They're still warm from the bathwater and it's somehow painfully unnerving. She raises a single eyebrow and then huffs. "Oh top sniveling, you know I find that sexy as all fuck. But biting one's partner to the point of profuse bleeding is not acceptable red behavior unless previously discussed."

"I'm sorry, I didn't know--" Rosa's heartbeat is getting incredibly fast; the closer she gets to Mindfang's bloody neck the more she wants to explore the limits of her pain tolerance. Not that she really wants to inflict pain because-- well-- she's not much of a sadist. But there is something intoxicating about drawing blood. The guilt, however, helps to outweigh all curiosities... for the moment.

"Really, Rosa. It's fine. It hurts but it's fine. I've had a lot worse done to me, I assure you." She's almost laughing now, rubbing her thumbs across Rosa's cheekbones. "You silly woman."

"But I just--"

"You're killing the mood, Pet. Either be a brat or be a good girl."

Rosa pauses in the process of liberally applying the vodka left over in Mindfang's flask to her shoulder. She doesn't quite feel like calling down to the front desk and asking for a proper disinfectant. It doesn't add much to the dangerous pirate theme they seem to be building. "Doesn't apologizing fall under the latter category?"

"No, that falls into the 'you're too good of a woman to deserve someone like me' category. Being a good girl would entail obeying me."

And this conversation definitely falls into the category of sexy pirate conversations. Rosa ignores the fact that her knees are still shaking from her last orgasm and that it's rather irresponsible of her to be so easily aroused by this. What happened to strength in the face of temptation?

She spreads a square of gauze over Mindfang's shoulder and carefully tapes it down. Mindfang grunts in pain but, within seconds, it turns into a moan. Rosa presses her fingers against it just enough to watch her face twitch.

Well. Mindfang might be a masochist but that doesn't appear to mean that she's adverse to a little pain herself.

"Now this is more like it, hmm?" Mindfang breathes, stretching her neck languidly. Rosa steps back and struggles not to use the nearest throw pillow as a modesty cover. Why is she always the only one naked? Other than being a slave. Because there has to be a better reason for Mindfang being consistently well-dressed while Rosa's in nothing but her own skin.
Mindfang runs her eyes across Rosa's body and rests her chin in the palm of her hand. She's languishing in her own brilliant fantasy-- or planning what to do next, Rosa can't really tell.

"What's more like it, Mistress?" Rosa asks, meeting Mindfang's eyes, trying to seem sultry instead of terrified. No, not terrified-- bewildered? Anxious? Not at all sure what the hell is going on but liking it?

Mindfang smirks and her face goes decidedly predatory-- fangs pricking her own lower lip and body at total ease. She looks like a queen presiding over her subjects, subjects that she's spent decades forcing into blind subservience. "Being properly waited upon by a gorgeous naked woman."

That's a compliment, she thinks. She stands a little straighter and balances her weight on her left hip. Her hair might need a trim, her ribs might be protruding a little too much and her scars might still be healing but-- hell-- if Mindfang doesn't mind, then neither does she.

"What is your wish, Mistress?" She murmurs, hoping she looks coy instead of idiotic.

Mindfang considers her for a few moments, then polishes off the last of the vodka in her flask. "What do you think I wish, Pet? Come here."

She looks like she's getting ready for dinner. A lovely dinner of freshly hunted baby deer. Rosa pads over to her hesitantly. When she's close enough that their knees bump together, she stops and blinks down slowly at Mindfang.

"...Rosa are you serious right now?" Mindfang covers her mouth with the back of her hand, struggling not to laugh. "Oh for the love of-- You are my favorite."

"You too." Rosa whispers, smiling so hard her cheeks ache.

Mindfang beams. And then smirks once more. "So. Are you going to prove it by being good and getting into my lap yourself, or are you going to make me force you?"

"Oh goodness me, I think I'm going to have to go with force." Rosa says, eyes wide. "I'd hate to have you think I was easy."

"You are anything but." Mindfang growls, reaching out and digging her fingertips into Rosa's hips. Her nails are impeccably manicured, kept just long enough to look elegant without encouraging any unsightly snags in delicate, but Rosa can still feel them.

Mindfang pulls her into her lap with enough force that Rosa gasps in pain. Her knees are forced into the carved arms of the chair and she whimpers, but Mindfang ignores her in favor of caressing her breasts with more than a little roughness.

"So... I bought a present for you while I was out, Pet," Mindfang croons, darkly, narrowing her eyes and leaving close enough that her breath can mist down Rosa's throat, hot as the steam off a kettle. "And I think you might like it."

Rosa flushes and keens, shivering despite how much she feels like she might be melting. Mindfang wraps her fingers around her throat and tugs, hard, to make her sit up straight once more.

"You can only have it, though, if you promise to be a good girl." Mindfang breathes, her voice as ambrosial as burnt sugar. Her eyes are glittering with an emotion that Rosa doesn't fully understand. Maybe it's... well... maybe it's something remarkable. Or maybe it's just lust. Very, very intense lust.

Rosa breathes in sharply, reaching up to curl her fingers across the cut of Mindfang's exquisite jaw.
She has to touch her-- feel her skin twitching and her coldness. Mindfang gives her a pleased smile and turns to kiss her fingertips.

"Mistress--" Rosa begins but Mindfang shushes her, sharply, giving her a disappointed frown that isn't at all convincing.

"Because you haven't been a very good girl at all lately." She purrs, suddenly biting hard at her neck. Rosa moans and arches her back as Mindfang's hands rise up to grope her breasts with unprecedented roughness. She tosses her head back as Mindfang bites a line across her throat, leaving a trail of bloodied bruises. With each pinch of her teeth she sucks just hard enough that Rosa feels the effects of it somewhere deep between her legs.

This should not be arousing. It is, anyways and Rosa lets her keep biting without even pretending to protest. Mindfang tugs at her nipple rings enough that she lets out a squall of pain and tries to pull away, halfheartedly because she has worn rings through those same breasts for years and doesn't exactly mind the pain. She quite likes it, in fact. If she didn't she'd have to be a complete masochist to get them pierced with Mindfang around.

Wait. There's something wrong with that statement. But Mindfang's doing a more than ample job of distracting her from puzzling out exactly what that is. It's hard to think straight with Mindfang quite literally all over her. So instead of correcting herself by recognizing that she is, in fact, quite the masochist, she just gives herself over to plaintively moaning.

Mindfang only stops biting her when she's wearing a necklace of bruises worked up by the pricking of fangs and a tongue that's far too adroit. Rosa's panting and keening protests as she frantically attempts to appear as if she's not a raging mess of desire, hands wrapped around Mindfang's horns to keep herself from falling off her lap as she rocks against her. The moment Mindfang pulls back Rosa's tugging on Mindfang's hair-- urging her to move her stupid face and kiss her.

"Now, now, Pet..." Mindfang breathes, kissing her roughly, their lips barely meeting before her fangs are dragging a line over her tongue. "You're not being very good at all. I don't think you deserve a present."

This is a situation that's rapidly disintegrating into dangerous territory. Rosa knows the intelligent, sane response is to ask Mindfang 'please stop' and, with all luck, she'll cease her attentions. The words are on the tip of her tongue-- she can say anything and this will end. Instantly.

But Rosa doesn't do that. She moans and shakes her head instead. "Please Mistress," she begs, trying to look plaintive, "I'll be good--"

What exactly is she promising right about now? She doesn't know, she's just saying what she can to get Mindfang between her legs.

"Well. I guess you'll get your present. I can't say no to that perfect face of yours." Mindfang is not looking at her face. She's staring at her breasts. Rosa grimaces but melts into her. A compliment's a compliment. "But that doesn't mean we're done having our little talk about your behavior."

Rosa swallows and nods. Is that a joke? Or is it not a joke? Oh goodness she's in trouble-- Well. Probably not, considering that Mindfang seems far too pleased with this course of events. She did promise to bring about revenge.

"Yes, Mistress." She breathes all the same, finally dropping all pretense that this isn't an incredibly dangerous exercise in power dynamics.
"Good girl. You might be worth the effort after all." Mindfang chuckles, squeezing her waist affectionately.

Rosa knows she's teasing but that doesn't mean it doesn't hurt to hear it. She winces and stares at the floor, biting back a sudden need to cry. Mindfang 'tsks' and grabs her by the chin, forcing her to meet her eyes. Rosa stares at her as best as she can, struggling to meet the force of her gaze.

"Pay attention." Mindfang murmurs, her voice deepening to a heart melting tone, the velvety-suede voice that she uses when she knows she'll get exactly what she wants because she is a mind-manipulator. But the force isn't in her words, just the headiness of her voice as she seduces her. Perhaps all she needs is the sexy as hell voice, not the mind games.

Mindfang gives her a wicked smile. She reaches into the pocket of her coat, draped over the back of the chair and rather dramatically produces something. In this case, that something is round and leather with just the faintest gleam of metal when she spins it around.

It's a collar. It's unmistakably a collar, forged from a black leather that still smells like beeswax and linseed oil. It's been polished to a mirror shine and the light from the fire gleams on its surface. Its thick, about two inches wide, and not at all understated. There isn't any way it could be mistaken for anything other than what it is. A collar.

The finishings are made from flawless brass, with an edge-free buckle that won't snag on her skin and a ring large enough that Mindfang can slip three fingers through it. Which she demonstrates by spinning it around her fingers.

"Well, Pet?" Mindfang asks in a tone of voice that conveys she's sure what the response is going to be. But when Rosa chances a split-second glimpse at her face she seems less than assured of herself.

Rosa swallows past the dryness in her throat. "Yes."

"Yes what." Mindfang snaps, narrowing her eyes.

"Yes, I like it." Rosa supplies, knowing full well that this isn't the requested statement. "Thank you, Mistress."

Mindfang smiles indulgently and her face relaxes. "I knew you'd be pleased."

Rosa exposes her neck before Mindfang's tirade can gain speed. Mindfang doesn't need another cue. She unbuckles the collar and guides it around Rosa's throat, the blue silk of the lining gliding across her skin like oil.

Mindfang doesn't take her eyes off Rosa's as she guides the collar's tongue through the buckle. She secures it past the point that it's comfortable to breathe, every breath entering her body with considerable effort. The collar's leather presses into the bruises that are already blossoming across her neck; every time she moves to breathe she can feel one bruise or another being pushed against. She stares at Mindfang with panicked eyes and Mindfang stares back, solemnly.

"Who do you belong to?" She asks, firmly and slowly, each letter pronounced with deliberate sound.

Rosa feels the pressure alleviate just enough so that she can gasp out the word: "You."

"Good girl." Mindfang purrs, running her tongue over her fangs. Rosa watches, panting, as each sharp pin-point vanishes than reappears, white as ivory against her red lips. "Good girl."

She re-fastens the collar with just enough slack that Rosa can take normal breaths, but not without
being forced to pay attention to the leather pressing against her airways. She arches her neck and breathes heavily, squirming at the feel.

"You are mine." Mindfang repeats with a deliberateness that sends Rosa's heart thrumming. Her gaze is mesmerizing and, for a few seconds Rosa can't even blink, so strong is the need to stare into her eyes. "You belong to me."

"I know." Is the only response she can voice, trying not to sob around the words, squeezing her eyes as if that's going to somehow deny the fact that she wants Mindfang to do nothing more but throw her onto the bed and do unspeakable things to her. "I know--"

"I need you to never forget it." Mindfang repeats, yanking on her collar ring so sharply that she loses all ability to breathe for a few moments. She follows the gesture, of course, wincing. Mindfang's face is painfully grim, eyes narrowed and all eight of her pupils blown out to threatening proportions. "Don't you ever run off on me again."

Rosa could punch her for that. Honestly-- how many times does she have to say this? But This isn't the time to be worrying about proper relationship dynamics; there's an aura of the feral surrounding them and Rosa knows rebuking her for saying something out of pure instinct won't go anywhere. And in the interest of full disclosure, she's a little too hormone riddled right now to refuse Mindfang anything.

Either way, she can't do anything but moan as Mindfang reaches out and yanks at her nipple rings, her entire body jolting forward. She didn't know she was capable of this degree of arousal; she needs Mindfang to touch her so badly that it's painful.

"Do you understand me, Pet?" Mindfang asks, her voice disintegrating into a growl. "You will listen to me."

"Yes," Rosa whispers, swallowing past the leather of her collar. Mindfang narrows her eyes and snarls. Within moments she's been toppled out of Mindfang's lap and is splayed out across the carpet. The breath flies out of her lungs and she whines instinctively, covering her head.

"I don't think you've learned your lesson yet, my Pet." Mindfang purrs, crouching down beside her. Rosa glances up between her fingers and ventures a snarl. Mindfang just snarls back and grabs her by her collar ring, hauling her to her feet. She does it slowly enough that Rosa stands more than is dragged. Mindfang's careful to ensure that each gesture she makes is measured and slow enough that Rosa has a chance to properly respond. That doesn't make it any less exciting, however. As always, Mindfang's just threatening enough to make Rosa forget that she's nothing more than a grumpy kitten wearing expensive boots.

Well. Perhaps something a little scarier than a kitten, since she is a bloodthirsty pirate who seems to have no goal beyond outright slaughter and the collection of wealth.

Mindfang drags her over to the bed and shoves her onto the mattress. Her upper body hits the blankets but she forces herself to remain standing-- she's less than willing to be entirely prone at this stage in these proceedings. Mindfang doesn't seem to care where her legs are, just that she's lying-- she makes sure that Rosa's actually on the bed before she continues.

She presses her body against Rosa's and she shivers at the sudden chill, her skin twitching anxiously as Mindfang's fingers trace along the outlines of her curves-- her breasts, her waist, her hips-- it's nice to have all those things coming back. The solid pressure of Mindfang on top of her certainly doesn't do anything to alleviate her arousal; if anything, she just starts thinking about how blissful she's going to be when Mindfang is on top of her naked.
"Why is she always wearing so many clothes?" Rosa whines into the bed, reaching up to clench her fingers around the fabric of the duvet.

"You have no idea what I want to do to you, Pet," Mindfang pants into her ear, her voice hitching as she presses her face into Rosa's hair and inhales. "But you're certainly going to find out."

Before Rosa can clarify whether not this is an actual threat, Mindfang's slipping off her. Before Rosa can register the fact that she's lost Mindfang's comforting weight, Mindfang's wrapped her hands around her wrists.

"What are you--?" Rosa starts to ask, but the moment Mindfang crosses her wrists over her back, she understands what's going on. "Oh, not this again--"

"Don't tempt me. I've already let so much of your..." She pauses and Rosa squirms in anticipation. "Mutinous behavior go unchecked."

Ohhh heavens she's pulling out pirate words. Rosa likes pirate words. Likes them a lot. So much so that she moans audibly. Mindfang snorts, derisively.

She squeezes the cross of Rosa's wrists so tightly that her fingernails sink into her skin. "Now. I'm going to leave you alone for just a second. And if you so much as most a single one of these gorgeous muscles of yours, I will--"

"Basil plant?" Rosa asks, doing her best not to sound sarcastic. She fails. With surprising precision and speed, Mindfang brings her hand down onto her exposed ass. Rosa yelps and immediately rushes to cover herself.

"What did I just say?" Mindfang hisses, moving her hands back. "Don't test me, Rosa. Move those hands again and you will get it."

Unfortunately, at this point she knows exactly what 'it' is. She keeps her hands crossed over the small of her back while Mindfang retreats. Her ability to remain in place fails her after only thirty seconds has passed; she turns her neck to see just where Mindfang has gone... only to make eye contact with the pirate looming close behind her.

"Well. It seems like someone is determined to see how serious I am." Mindfang mutters, narrowing her eyes and snapping a rope between her hands.

What is it with this woman and rope? Rosa shies away at the feel of her hands, cold as a baking sheet left out in the snow, as Mindfang presses her back into the bed via her neck.

"Be good!" Mindfang warns, slapping her hard on the ass as she makes a whole-hearted attempt to get away (which still fails). "Do you want me to stop? Because I'll stop."

"...No." Rosa murmurs, slumping onto the bed. She's in no mood to fight; if Mindfang wants to tie her up, well, she doesn't really mind. Mindfang makes quick work of tying her hands together, wrapping the rope around in a complicated figure eight. Rosa feels the way her wrists twitch as she executed what is, presumably, a complicated knot. She tests the strength of her bond and finds that, yes, it most certainly is.

Mindfang traces the valley of her spine in a single, long caress. A shiver of frisson hits her at the sudden juxtaposition of warm and cool skin and Rosa gives herself over to enjoying it completely.

She's forgotten the simple pleasure of being touched; Mindfang touches her a lot, of course, but the novelty had worn off after three months. But it's hard not to enjoy Mindfang's touch when she's got
Rosa struggling to breathe through her moaning.

Mindfang tugs at the rope around her wrists. Rosa groans and her knees go weak. Oh dear, she is quite the masochist, isn't she? Really, it seems like an awful idea to be making Mindfang aware of this particular pleasure. Mindfang's definitely going to use that against her immediately. She needs to work on getting better at lying during sex.

"Didn't I tell you to hold still?" Mindfang says, sharply. She spanks her again and Rosa yelps. Her feet scramble against the marble floor to keep her balance. Mindfang lets out a playful growl-- yes, Rosa assures herself, that's definitely playful, not angry-- and brings her hand down harder. The resulting sound of her palm meeting her skin is a resounding smack.

Rosa yowls but, this time, Mindfang doesn't stop. She doesn't stop for a while, in fact. Rosa's left howling into the duvet. Every slap is epilogued by a soft moan as endorphins kick in, followed by a sharp anxiety of when to next anticipate pain. Rosa breathes in through her nose in an attempt not to show Mindfang just how painfully enticed she is by this but it's futile-- the woman has a knee pressed between her legs, she has to know.

Mindfang's body keeps her legs pinned against the bedframe so she can't kick-- which is probably a good thing because she's pretty damn aroused and it probably would ruin the mood to kick Mindfang in the nook. Or any other part of the body.

Or maybe not? Rosa hisses as Mindfang smacks her particularly hard. The hiss is followed by a moan as Mindfang settles her hand against Rosa's heated skin. For once the coolness of her body feels heavenly instead of alarming. She doesn't bruise easily but, well, she's still going to be sore, and the cold helps. A little. She gaps as Mindfang "Your ass is hurting my hand." Mindfang mutters, digging her fingertips into her flesh. Rosa hisses and tosses her head back. Her horn makes contact with Mindfang's shoulder and she swears, quietly, but doesn't react. "You naughty thing. You're even causing problems for me when I'm trying to teach you a lesson."

"Maybe you're not trying hard enough?" Rosa asks, smugly. Mindfang groans and rocks her hips against Rosa's, driving her into the mattress. She looks painfully smug as Rosa's composure finally departs the atmosphere and her face crumbles. Ohh dear, that's nice. That's exactly what she's looking for. Except not entirely because she's still wearing clothes.

"Do you want me to get my crop?" Mindfang purrs, dragging her lips across the portion of her neck exposed above her collar. Rosa moans. She's going to be covered in bruises tomorrow morning and probably desperate to rip Mindfang's face off in revenge, but none of that matters at the moment. She's a bit too busy keening into their bed to worry about the morning after because the night of is shaping up to be exquisitely enjoyable.

"What do you say, Pet, hmm? You want me to track it down." Mindfang chuckles as Rosa frantically struggles beneath her. Her hands slip around Rosa's hips, knuckles digging into her hipbones.

Rosa moans. Mindfang chuckles. "That's an actual question. I'm not trying to be attractive, I would honestly like to know."

"I'm not exactly making coherent decisions right now." Rosa whispers, gasping as Mindfang rolls her onto her back. "Just get on with it."

"This is why I wanted to talk about this, you know." Mindfang mutters, abruptly pulling Rosa's legs
apart and slipping between them. "I'd have things prepared."

Rosa struggles to sit up. Mindfang's tied her up quite well, apparently having learned from last time not to give her any leeway. It seems more than a little unfair, considering that they're having sex not implementing a half-hearted suicide watch. "This is unprepared?"

"Mmmhmm." Mindfang shrugs a little and traces lazy circles around Rosa's breasts. "Just imagine how much better things could be."

Rosa raises her eyebrows. She shouldn't. She really shouldn't. Mindfang most certainly has a crop-- it's in their armoire, which she seems to have forgotten-- and she probably would be more than happy to use it. But it's just so hard to pass up this chance. "I usually do."

Mindfang yanks her onto her feet by the ring of her collar; the buckle strains and she wheezes, but it's effective. She tries to stare Rosa down, but she won't blink away. "You don't want to tempt me, Pet."

"Oh, I think I kind of do." Rosa purrs, wrapping her legs around Mindfang's knees and tugging. Mindfang doesn't move, of course; she's standing too solidly for that. But she does smirk and-- finally-- drops Rosa's collar.

"I'm going to fuck you senseless." She rasps, squeezing Rosa's waist tightly. Rosa squeaks and jolts upright; she instinctively attempts to grab Mindfang's shoulders for support but her hands are still perfectly tied. "But that's not going to happen while I'm fully dressed."

She's really not doing a very good job at this, is she? She keeps setting herself up for responses that just make her feel stupid. "Well. That depends."

"Damnit Rosa, I'm trying to be in charge." Mindfang growls, shoving her across the room. "Take my clothes off."

This keeps happening. Is she really doing this on purpose? "...You tied my hands behind my back, sweetheart, that's not going to happen."

Mindfang snarls and yanks her collar hard, sending her stumbling into her arms. She narrows her eyes and Rosa immediately tries to pull away from her. "Don't call me that."

"My point still stands, Captain. I'm not removing anyone's clothes while you have me tied up." Rosa hisses through gritted teeth, glowering in an attempt to make up for her over-rapid heartbeat.

She smirks and raises her eyebrows. "Well... You have teeth, don't you?"

Oh dear heavens. She can't be serious.

...Can she? Apparently so, because she's staring Rosa down like they're suddenly in a courthouse and this is an open and shut trial they're only taking to a jury for posterity's sake.

"You'd better not make me do this while we're both standing." Rosa hisses and Mindfang is kind enough to acquiesce, falling to her knees on the throw rug next to their bed.

Rosa kneels down beside her and huffily throws Mindfang's hair out of the way. She grumbles about being 'ill-treated' but doesn't make a move to do anything remotely resembling a reprimand, so Rosa assumes she knows when not to push her luck.

The back of her dress is covered in buttons, of course, and Rosa sets to unfastening them with a
scowl. The first one takes about four minutes of swearing and delicate dental maneuvering. She does her best to make as much lip-to-skin contact as she can, breathing a little too heavily than is necessary. The second goes twice as fast and by the time she's eight down, Mindfang's twitching.

"...This seemed a lot sexier in my head." She admits, slowly.

Rosa nods. Her neck hurts and it's hard to bend it at this angle with a collar on-- its cutting off her breathing something awful. Mindfang gets to her feet huffily and yanks her dress off, shimmying out of it instead of taking the time to undo the buttons. Rosa watches her with a satisfied sneer because that's what she thought

Mindfang tosses her dress over the armchair and quickly follows it with her slip-- oh dear heavens she's even wearing a ridiculously complicated garter belt that takes her two hands to undo.

"This was definitely not my best idea. I feel like a total bitch for suggesting this right now. I'm being completely honest with you right now, Pet. I'm so sorry."

Rosa shrugs and rolls her shoulders as best as she can, trying to work out the knots already forming from being tied up. The pain is decidedly easier to handle with patches of Mindfang’s skin coming into view-- especially accented with lots of black lace. The woman looks nice in lace. (But she looks even nicer with all of it off).

The moment she's naked, she dives back onto the rug, pulling Rosa on top of her. Rosa yelps as one of her feet gets pinched and she falls forward. Mindfang has to help her sit back up and they stare at each other awkwardly. They're kissing in moments, Mindfang clutching her jaw and Rosa rubbing the back of her knees with her foot.

Eventually Mindfang's hands visit a little more intimately, tracing down her ribcage with long, slow gestures-- up, down, up some more, down further--

Rosa's squirming towards her frantically, making a focused effort not to bite her again to get things moving. She might be frustrated but-- well-- she sort of likes that. A lot.

Eventually she slips a hand between Rosa's legs, dragging her hands up and down the skin of her inner thigh. She makes soft circles with her thumb and Rosa moans against Mindfang's lips.

"Bed or floor?" Mindfang asks, coyly, her hair sweeping over Rosa like a particularly slinky cat. Rosa can't think much further than the hand that's rubbing her thigh just below her nook.

"Bed." She finally pants. Mindfang drags her onto the bed; with her hands still tied behind her she can't stand up, nor does it seem like Mindfang is in any mood to wait for anything.

The mattress shifts with Mindfang’s eagerness to get Rosa flat on her back. She's not so carried away to remember to put a pillow under her head, however, which Rosa rather appreciates. Her wrists dig into the small of her back and she hisses as they're contorted to an awkward angle. She doesn't weight too much, but, well, the pressure is enough to hurt.

Mindfang spreads her knees apart and scrambles between them, planting her hands on either side of Rosa's shoulders. She kisses her first, with an anxious possessiveness that's exhilarating. Rosa kisses her back, glad to finally be able to reciprocate. The kiss lasts longer than usual, going until there's more an a little chafing.

"I'm going at your breasts again." Mindfang whispers when she pulls away, craning her neck to nuzzle her neck. Rosa giggles-- giggles-- and doesn't protest.
She's at that point right now where nothing would feel awful. The moment Mindfang slips down and pulls one of the rings into her mouth Rosa's entire body twinges. She traps the ring between her teeth and tugs it around gently, gauging Rosa's reactions when she moves it different ways. It hurts, of course, but she doesn't ask for a reprieve. The second she yelps, of course, Mindfang switches to the other breast with excited abandon.

Mindfang most certainly likes the rings-- especially tugging at them with her teeth. Rosa's going to really enjoy that in a few weeks but, well, right now she just... vaguely likes it. Mindfang slips down her body steadily, nuzzling at her ribs and kissing the scarred plane of her stomach as Rosa writhes on the bed with confused excitement. This buildup is exquisite and she very much approves.

She approves so much, in fact, that she forgets that giving Mindfang a full pass at any single second is a stupid plan. Mindfang pulls her legs steadily more apart as she moves downward, finally baring her nook completely as she reaches her hips.

"Angle yourself up." Mindfang whispers, seductively, as if she's promising expensive chocolate instead of dubious behavior. She does as told and Mindfang laughs triumphantly. The moment she's at a halfway decent angle Mindfang's head descends quickly.

"What are you doing?" Rosa gasps, craning her neck in an attempt to see what the hell she's up to. She's most certainly between her legs still; Rosa can feel her shoulders against her calves as she frantically squirms across the bed to get a better viewpoint. The whole 'hands tied behind her back' thing doesn't make sitting up very plausible; every attempt yanks at her shoulders painfully but Mindfang’s hands are still on her hips so she can't quite free them.

"Vienna!" She growls, slamming a foot into the mattress. Mindfang chuckles, but doesn't respond. Rosa's prepared to demand an explanation when she feels Mindfang's breath against her nook. Every muscle in her body goes marble solid. She's prepared to kick at a moment's notice but holds back because maybe she's not going to do what Rosa thinks she is--

Her lips brush against her thigh, uncomfortably close to a place she should not be. Rosa tries to snap her legs shut but, well, with her horns in the way that does not happen. Mindfang ignores her quite adeptly and does right on making herself at home, nuzzling her contentedly.

"If you don't keep your legs still I'm going to tie them in place, Pet," Mindfang mutters, huffing. "Honestly. You'd think I was trying to brand you instead of eat you out."

Before she can file an official complaint about how this was not on the schedule, Mindfang’s biting her thigh. Rosa yelps and kicks out her right leg-- Mindfang's just as quick to attack her other thigh and she yowls.

"We've got two choices here, sweetheart." Mindfang purrs, resting her chin between Rosa's hipbones. She's grinning like a parrot who just learned how to use curse words and does not help matters by dragging her tongue over her teeth. "Either you let me get you off, or we see how riled up I can make you before you agree to let me get you off."

Rosa snarls and shakes her head. She pulls her knees back up and digs her toes into Mindfang's ribcage. She doesn't do anything more than grin and shake her hair over her shoulder.

"Be a good girl," Mindfang purrs, nuzzling her legs. In the dimly lit room Rosa can barely make out the tonal differences in their skin; Mindfang's ashy shade and her own polished platinum color appear almost the same. "You won't regret it. I promise."
Rosa brings her knees as close together as she can, cursing the fact that they have horns-- without them her attempts to suffocate her significant other would be far more successful. "This hardly seems pleasant--"

Mindfang hisses, her fingers digging into her flesh with claw-like strength. Rosa glares, struggling to maintain stoic disapproval in the face of Mindfang's gloriously pouty face. "Ohh, darling-- darling. Don't ever say that."

"You sound the same way you did when I first moved in." Rosa mutters huffily, rolling her eyes. "And two minutes later you were taking advantage of me."

Mindfang glares. This is clearly not a very good negotiation tactic and Rosa doesn't say a syllable more in the fact of that snarl. "I'm still taking advantage of you-- stop changing the fucking subject and let me go down on you."

"I hardly see how I have a choice--"

"Oh good, consent!"

"That's not consent--" Rosa growls but-- of course-- Mindfang's already shoving her knees apart and, in moments, she's worrying at the bite marks on her thighs again.

She's not going to win this one. Mindfang's ridiculously determined which, at any other moment, would be acceptable, but she's not quite sure how she feels about oral sex-- but Mindfang seems to have decided for her.

Mindfang has absolutely no shame about any of this; there's been enough foreplay that there isn't much need for her to do much buildup. Or is this the buildup? She doesn't understand that part yet.

Her breath is painfully warm and Rosa flinches, screwing her eyes shut. She should not be more anxious about this than having Mindfang tie her up and slap her ass bright green. But she is.

"Hush, darling," Mindfang murmurs, voice reverberating against her skin as she kisses her thigh once more. "What do you think I'm going to do to you?"

"You bit me already."

"You bit me already." Mindfang counters, laughing a little. Rosa doesn't feel at all comfortable with the fact that she's having a conversation with a woman two inches from her nook.

It gets even worse when she circles in for the... kill, so to speak. Rosa jolts at the first press of her face against her anxiously stimulated skin, unsure of which direction to go. She would be lying if she said she didn't enjoy the temperature difference because that is lovely--

And then things begin to happen a little too quickly. Mindfang relinquishes her death grip on Rosa's hips to part the folds of her nook, cold fingers making her gasp and then-- oh dear-- she goes for the erogenous zone. Her lips and tongue make short work of dissolving her reservations, tracing a slow circuit over her nook as she works a pair of fingers inside her. The fingers alone would be enough to make her eyes go blank but...

Well. Her tongue. Rosa had not been at all aware that her tongue was quite that talented until she circles in on the small cluster of nerves that's all of her currently-exposed bulge. Mindfang teases it mercilessly the moment Rosa makes the mistake of moaning a little too loudly. Mindfang curls her fingers inside her as she works and Rosa lets out a continuously anxious stream of pleas-- increasingly loud moans that turn into howls as she thrashes her head around in a frantic attempt to
find something to bite down on but can't.

Her eyes frantically alternate between wide and gaping at the ceiling and screwed so tightly shut that she sees ultraviolet; she digs her fingers into the palms of her hand until she feels genuine pain and her toes are beginning to cramp from remaining to tightly curled. She tries to make herself comfortable but it's not much use-- she can't pay attention to much beyond the aching pleasure brought forth by Mindfang's eager tongue. The pained frenzy of sensation is impressive and, for once, she's glad that Mindfang's quite this persuasive.

Mindfang's free hand curls around her thigh and urges Rosa's leg around her back-- she's not entirely sure why but she does as instructed. Within a few moments Mindfang's working at a different angle, somehow one that's exponentially better--

"Captain," She rasps, settling for squeezing her eyes shut to keep from staring at the back of Mindfang's head and agonizing about how much she'd like to have her hands free right about now.

At the title Mindfang moans-- the feeling of it amplifies the intensity of her mouth pressed against her nook and Rosa almost kicks her. She doesn't, thankfully-- but she can barely pay enough attention to tell what Mindfang's doing beyond how amazing it feels.

She digs her heel between Mindfang's shoulder blades-- Mindfang accepts the urging without complaint. Rosa begins to rock her hips with a little too much intent and Mindfang needs no more urging to speed up the process.

Rosa likes to think of herself as a quiet woman. Keeps her thoughts to herself, speaks up when she feels fully at home and keeps her conversation to a minimum. But Mindfang has a way of, well, bringing out the boisterous side of her.

"Vienna!" Rosa begs as her tongue brushes against the perfect spot at the same time her fingers nudge against something else--

She howls as she orgasms. There's no other way to explain it; she arches her back, straining her shoulders as all her weight goes onto her bound wrists. Mindfang keeps working at her nook until she collapses back onto the mattress, leg finally falling back down.

The sudden post-orgasm silence is staggering. Her own caterwauling rings in her ears as she melts back into the bed. For a few moments she can't do much more than focus on breathing and seriously consider how great it would be to get her hands back so they can keep the momentum going.

Mindfang doesn't pull away, even though she must know she's done her job. She seems perfectly content where she is, tongue lazily making long strokes over Rosa's nook. She does withdraw her hand, however, absently wiping her fingers on Rosa's inner thigh. Mindfang keeps working at her nook until Rosa shies away, hips jerking backwards to escape the overstimulation.

She sits up, slowly and Rosa gapes upon seeing her naked breasts once more. She might have just finished her second orgasm of the night but that doesn't make her any less ready for more. Nor does it make Mindfang any less attractive. Rosa can't bring herself to sit up and stays exactly where she is. There's warm night air blowing in from the balcony and Mindfang's curls flutter into her face.

Mindfang shakes them away, awkwardly, growling a little when they refuse to stay put. Rosa laughs, hazily, and the growl is immediately turned on her. Within moments Rosa's covered by an over amorous pirate; she dives between her legs and goes right for her neck. Her fingers dig into the bruises already forming there and Rosa moans. Ohhh that's nice.
"Your turn?" Rosa pants and Mindfang chuckles, nodding emphatically. She bites up another bruise, just for good measure, and then goes in for a kiss.

At that, Rosa stops her, angling her head away. Mmm nope. Nope. That's not going to happen. Oh dear, no, that is not going to happen.

Mindfang groans, in a decidedly non-sexual fashion. It's more of a 'I'm going to murder your face' moan than a 'sexy as all hell attractive woman naked in front of me' moan. "Dammit Rosa, what now?"

"...Are you not going to brush your teeth?" Rosa asks, anxiously, and Mindfang gives her an exasperated stare.

"Rosa, Pet, I'm incredibly sorry, but I am not about to put off getting off just to brush my teeth. That's not going to happen--"

"Isn't that--"

Mindfang grabs her face and kisses her, hard. Rosa yelps but can't do anything more than let her have her way; such is the course of their relationship, it seems. Sometimes letting her do whatever the fresh hell she wants is the best idea. Especially in sexual moments. She studiously does not think about where Mindfang's mouth was two minutes ago or what she tastes like.

When she finally pulls away, Rosa winces. Oh dear, she bit her lip. That hurts. It's one thing for Mindfang to tie her up and beat her but biting her lip is totally unacceptable. Somehow. "Mmmmmm nope, we're having sex. Immediately."

Rosa huffs. Mindfang scowls and tugs at one of her nipple rings. She lets out a painfully breathy yelp and Mindfang goes back to looking like a very pleased cobra.

"Now. Are we going to have more trouble or are you going to be a good girl when I untie you?"

"Have I ever been?" Rosa asks, primly. She shakes her head a bit to clear her hair out of her eyes

Mindfang narrows her eyes. Before Rosa can contemplate the merits of investing in chainmail one of these days, Mindfang's clambered off her and is yanking Rosa onto her back none too gently.

She hardly has time to mind the rough treatment before Mindfang's struggling to untie her wrists. "You know what, I have been waiting far too long and I am far too horny to keep up with this dignified bullshit--"

The knot will not come undone. Mindfang snarls and tumbles off the bed. Yanking open the drawer of the bedside table she produces a knife. Rosa's lungs go diamond solid because oh dear is she going to get stabbed?

No. No, that's stupid-- Mindfang rips through the rope in a single smooth gesture. She shakes off the fraying remains of the curtain tie and Mindfang embeds her knife into the table with remarkable force-- half the blade sinks in and the handle is left twanging.

Mindfang tackles her again and, this time, Rosa's able adequately reciprocate. She grabs Mindfang by the curls and yanks, hard. Their lips meet with a painful clink of teeth. They're both breathless and none too careful, Rosa struggling to hard to keep kissing her that she frequently misses her lips entirely and ends up all over Mindfang's face. Mindfang doesn't seem that perturbed, however; she's got her hands curled over Rosa's breasts and already has one of her legs flung over Rosa's hips.
Rosa's own hands are highly occupied with running up and down Mindfang's leg, exhilarated at the feeling of digging her fingertips into her decidedly better-padded flesh. She's so cold-- it's fantastic.

"Damnit, Rosa, fuck me." She hisses. There's only the briefest of awkward pauses before she obliges-- and that's not due to any sort of anxiety this time but rather the need to reshuffle their bodies to get at the right angle. Mindfang doesn't want to move away from her at all; she insists on remaining close enough that they don't have to stop kissing and that makes Rosa's job a little more difficult... mostly due to a superb distraction.

Mindfang's nook is warm against the backdrop of wintery skin and Rosa's all too eager to delve in. She doesn't pull away from Rosa for the briefest second, not even to moan. Her hands slip up to her shoulders a little too close to her neck and Rosa winces at the feel of her collar's buckle digging into her skin.

She brushes her fingers across Mindfang's nook and the hands at her shoulders squeeze affirmatively. She could go right in, couldn't she? They have been at this for quite some time--

"If you are going to fuck with me, I am not above getting myself off and exploring the wonders of orgasm denial. And by wonders I mean the sheer agony." Mindfang can't stop growling. It's attractive but also more than a little nerve wracking.

"I'm just trying to do a good job!" Rosa grimaces, parting the folds of Mindfang's nook with shaky fingertips. She can't recall if they've every laid face to face before-- she likes it. She likes the fact that Mindfang's hair is fanned out beneath her shoulders like an incredible living pillowcase. She likes the fact that it's almost impossible to do anything but stare into her eyes because any movement of their heads could impossible tangle their horns. She especially likes the ability to take in every curve of Mindfang's face as she drags her fingers across her skin.

Rosa laughs, breathlessly and gives her an anxious smile. "You do set a pretty intimidating standard, you know."

"I don't exactly fuck about quality--" Mindfang's eyes go suddenly blank as Rosa gives up all pretense of foreplay and simply slips her fingers inside. All eight of her pupils stare into a different world entirely as she sucks in a surprised gasp and then attacks, kissing Rosa for all she's worth.

The sensation of being inside of her while they're twined together in bed, naked as the stars through a telescope, is vastly different than the night before. Instead of being completely overwhelmed by the feeling of her nook she's torn between so many things-- Mindfang's hands on her neck, the sound of her agonized breathing, the feeling of their skin pressed together, the bizarre amalgam of her perfume and their pheromones-- she can't decide on one thing.

But still, she's still enthralled with the feeling of Mindfang around her fingers, tantalizingly warm and so wholly alive that Mindfang is the center of her world. She's completely open to Rosa at this angle, legs spread at an incomprehensibly obscene angle over Rosa's hips.

She moans into Rosa's mouth and the sensation is-- well-- bizarre. Rosa takes it as a compliment, either way. She works her fingers against Mindfang's nook, trying to discover the place on Mindfang's body that will produce the desired results.

This task is made far easier when Mindfang lets go of her shoulder to guide her. She's remarkably demanding. Still, she does as indicated, moving her fingers in deeper and driving the heel of her palm into her retracted bulge. Rosa moves tentatively at first, not entirely comfortable with getting more aggressive but--
Mindfang bits her lip again and snarls. She takes the hint and begins an assault instead of a soft caress. It feels impressive to be in complete control of a woman who's so utterly a goddess in all other realms— and it gets even better to watch her come unravelled at the seams.

As Rosa works to keep up the correct cadence and pressure, Mindfang responds in kind; she begins to rock her hips against Rosa's hand in encouragement. Every time she gets herself at the perfect angle she moans increasingly louder until Rosa figures it out and adjusts herself.

"Mmmmmmmmmmpf." Mindfang moans against her mouth, the sound going from arousingly low to vulnerably high. Rosa squeezes her breast as hard as she can— on a hunch— and she gets an honest whimper. Mindfang's nook clenches around her fingers with shocking pressure— the feeling of Mindfang's nook pulsing around her hand makes Rosa do a bit of moaning herself.

She continues taking cues from Mindfang as best as she can— there's only three more moments of growled commentary 'harder', not there and, of course, 'fuck me yes' which is the most rewarding one of all. Rosa's not entirely sure what's going to happen when she orgasms but— well—

Mindfang breaks their kiss to bury her face into Rosa's shoulder, her moaning high and breathless. Between the two of them— Rosa's efforts and Mindfang's excited gestures— it's hard to tell what's going on but she knows what it means to hear those delicate noises in her ear.

Delicate. She never thought she'd use that word to describe Mindfang, especially not her orgasm. But it is a perfect description— she whines, almost, and the only words she can make out are 'please', 'yes' and her own name— 'Annorrrrrrrrrra' dragged out for all it's worth.

She's not a fan of her own name. But it's rather hard not to appreciate it when it's being panted in the throes of an orgasm. She keeps working against her until Mindfang stops moving and just groans. Her arm goes limp and slips off of Rosa's shoulder to land between them, pillowed against Rosa's breasts.

"...Did I do it right?" Rosa asks after a pause.

Mindfang stirs a little, opening one of her eyes— the creepy eye, not the normal one. It is, however, decidedly less creepy when she looks absolutely blissful. "Yes. That. That was... that."

"I'm taking the speechlessness as the highest form of compliment." Rosa murmurs, shifting closer. Mindfang purrs and drapes an arm over her, hand landing possessively on her hips. She rubs her foot along Rosa's calf and beams.

Rosa rests a hand against her face. Her cheeks are still flushed a rich shade of cobalt, lips just as blue from where she bit them over and over. The places where her blood has pooled is unnervingly colder than the rest of her skin.

If Rosa were a little more interested in biology, she'd stop to contemplate the complicated physical mechanisms that must be at work to keep her internal organs at a functional temperature. Maybe that's why she eats so much? Oh dear, who cares.

Either way, she feels a wonderful sense of pride as Mindfang nuzzles into her palm.

They lie like that for some time, Mindfang seeming completely unwilling to move at all. She's barely even breathing. Eventually, however, she begins to rub her hand up and down Rosa's ass.

"That kind of hurts." Rosa whispers finally, raising her eyebrows. Mindfang trills apologetically and stops, squeezing her waist instead.
She nuzzles in closer and kisses her once more, this one actually *functional* as a means of affection-- their lips meet, their tongues brush and she feels the brush of Mindfang's forehead against her own.

"Sorry, Pet." Mindfang mumbles, nuzzling her cheeks. "Sorry."

Rosa shrugs and sits up slowly, stretching her neck from side to side. She'd forgotten what it felt like to wear a collar-- it's sort of *heavy*, isn't it? Heavy and stiff, so that no matter where she moves her head she can't escape the feeling of wearing it.

She likes it. But she doesn't mind very much when Mindfang sits up slowly, shaking her hair down her back, and unfastens it. She tosses it onto the nightstand. It lands next to her dagger with a 'clink' of metal on wood.

Mindfang wraps her arms around her and squeezes, tightly. Rosa yelps at the feel of fingers against her ribcage, but tilts her head so that Mindfang can nuzzle into her neck. She hums, softly, and Rosa smiles.

She's a heavy weight on Rosa's back, but a nice one. A comforting one. Eventually she decides that they should be laying down and flops onto the mattress, taking Rosa with her. After some yelping and awkward attempts to get comfortable which *shouldn't* be awkward since they just had *sex* but still-- they get comfortable.

Mindfang sighs and presses her face to the back of Rosa's neck. She clears her throat and Rosa opens an eye with sudden anxiety. "I'm sorry we didn't define things well enough before I got... um... carried away. It happens. I'm just really fucking lucky you're a masochist, aren't I?"

"I think we both knew, that, Captain." Rosa purrs, rolling her eyes. Mindfang giggles.

"That felt nice. Really nice. Definitely fulfills all fantasies. Very happy pirate." She stretches her legs, languidly, and rolls onto her back with her arms splayed over her head. Rosa cuddles into her, head on her breasts and eyes exhaustedly closed.

"I'm so glad I could live up to expectations." She murmurs, grinning.

Mindfang sighs again and sits up. Rosa rolls over to give her a worried look. Oh dear, is she about to get broken up with? Ohh no, that's not about to happen. Mostly because she is *not* going to have couple sex and then go back to *no* sex because that is unacceptable.

"Well, in the future I'd like to talk about things. I-- um-- understand how painful this dynamic must be for you. I hope you don't think this is how I feel about you. I mean, I do feel that way about you, but in the whole 'I want to have sex with you for days on end' way, not the 'tying you up because you deserve it way. Although I have done that, so I don't really know what I'm trying to say, but the basic gist is that I like being bossy and you're really cute when you're overwhelmed? And I just don't know how to handle things because you are *very* attractive and I spent three months *not* having sex with you so I get kind of *carried away* because-- I just--"

"...Can we have this conversation in the morning when I'm not thinking of anything beyond the fact that we finally had *real* couple sex and it was quite enjoyable?"

"Of course, Rosa."

"...Are you actually upset with me?"

"Ohhh most certainly not." Mindfang purrs, pulling the blankets up around them. For once Rosa doesn't try to shove them away. She curls into Mindfang’s embrace until-- once more-- they're face to
face. "I am... well... satiated is the closest word I can find. Gratified? I don't know-- I just-- well--- I waited *so long* for this, Annora."

"...Thank you." Rosa whispers. Mindfang tenses beside her and makes an agonized noise.

"You have nothing to thank me for."
The morning dawns late and close to eleven at the sound of a seagull flying into their bedroom window. That is to say they don't wake up until very late in the day, tangled around one another like a carelessly folded fish net. Mindfang's hair sticks to her sweaty shoulder and Rosa's awkwardly aware of the fact that she was drooling onto the pillow they're sharing.

Neither of them seem at all willing to fully wake, but instead stare at each other sleepily, not moving a muscle. Rosa's flat on her back arms splayed above her head and Mindfang, beside her, is splayed on her stomach, clutching a pillow to her chest. She smiles over at Rosa

"Aren't you going to get me breakfast?" Mindfang asks, voice hoarse with sleep. She rolls over onto her back and gives Rosa a suggestive smirk before coughing and making a displeased face. "Ugh.
Blergh. And some water?

Rosa shares the feeling; every time she swallows it feels like she's been drinking seawater for the past ten hours instead of sleeping off a night of hedonistic sex.

However, Rosa blinks at Mindfang repeatedly instead of acquiescing to her request. Her eyes feel almost as burnt as her esophagus and it is unpleasant just to think about talking. She pulls the sheets back up around herself, yelping a little when cold fabric hits her bare skin. She squirms over to Mindfang, overtaxing her stiff, unwilling muscles with the effort. Mindfang reaches out and ruffles her hair-- Rosa trills angrily and presses her face into Mindfang's throat.

She smells like sex. Rosa wants to sneeze at first, but instead inhales more deeply-- Mindfang's stale perfume from the day before, hormones, sweat-- it's not the most pleasant mixture of aromas but it's not the worst either.

Mindfang grumbles about Rosa's horns digging into her face and shoves her away. She sighs and rolls back over, clutching a pillow to her chest. Mindfang's quick to cuddle up to her back, however, resting her chin against Rosa's shoulder and kicking her until she moves her legs into a more comfortable position.

"Breakfast." She repeats, her voice sultry and uncomfortably demanding. Rosa squeezes her eyes shut and pretends to be asleep. It's not hard-- she's almost there as is. She's not entirely prepared to wake up and face the reality of what she consented to last night.

It seems to be a trend with her, lately. Ugh. Perhaps Mindfang isn't the best influence? Not that she has much of a choice. What would she even say-- 'I don't think we should socialize anymore because of the abruptly self-aggrandizing turn my behavior has taken'. What would Mindfang say to that? 'That's okay, dear'? Probably not. She'd probably laugh and then kiss her more and cosset her with jewels and flattery until she agreed to sexual encounters once more. Or just pretend she didn't hear.

That... seems more accurate.

"Rosaaaaa, are you ignoring me?" Mindfang bites at the rings running up her ear, going slowly from the lobe to the sharp point. Rosa twitches a little, but manages to constrain her need to moan. "Rosa, I'm hungry."

She continues pretending to sleep, not deigning to give Mindfang's requests even the slightest bit of attention. This is not the greatest way to wake up the morning after passionate lovemaking.

"Rosaaaaaa--" Mindfang breathes heavily against her neck and sneaks her fingers, like the legs of a spider, up to her breast. And then she grabs hold of her nipple ring and tugs.

Rosa yowls and slaps her away, almost falling out of the bed in her fervor to make her stop because damnitall she wants to go back to bed. "If you tell me to get you breakfast one more time I'm going to pierce your nipples the next time you're passed out drunk on the floor."

"...You wouldn't." Mindfang gasps. The sheets are yanked off of her as she pulls them up to cover her own chest; Rosa steals them back with a hiss.

"Try me." Rosa growls, flopping down and yanking the quilt over her head for good measure. "I will get you breakfast when I am done sleeping off what you did to me last night."

Mindfang makes a pleased noise. Rosa would hazard a guess that she executes a perfect hair toss and sits up like a particularly proud cat in a sunbeam. "That good, huh?"
"Yes. It was glorious and I still want well-fucked so shut up and let me sleep." Rosa mutters, pressing her face into the pillow and letting out a theatrical sob. Mindfang rubs her shoulders and sighs, heavily. Her hands hesitantly slip away from Rosa's skin, the chill of her touch leaving a ghostly trail. When wrapping her hands around Rosa's waist and squeezing fails to garner a response, Mindfang flops to the other side and groans.

"Acceptable excuse. Go back to sleep, then. I'll allow it."

"You'll allow it?" Rosa repeats, darkly. Mindfang squeaks. It's not much of a victory, but it is something. So she takes it.

* * *

She manages to fall back asleep after ten minutes of peace, silence only broken by Mindfang's fidgeting and the faint crashing of the sea outside their hotel room. Her dreams, brief as they are, have enough bizarre content that when Mindfang wakes her an hour later, she's grateful instead of homicidal.

"I brought you breakfast," Mindfang whispers, climbing carefully onto the bed. Rosa stirs, sluggishly, and struggles to disentangle herself from the blankets. Mindfang had tucked her into bed quite well after she fell asleep, clearly failing to recollect that her partner is far less susceptible to cold. It would be annoying if it wasn't so sweetly-intentioned. "Shall I feed you, or is that going too far?"

"Too far." Rosa grumbles. Mindfang laughs, the sound bright and liberal in their generously proportioned hotel room. Before Rosa can get all the way to a seated position, Mindfang's scrambling over her and going for the gold-- it takes less than ten seconds for a pair of hands to curl around her breasts and even less time for them to be kissing like idiots.

Rosa laughs against Mindfang's lips, freeing her hands from the sheets with a few frantic gestures to curl around the pirate's horns. Their noses bump and Rosa yelps at the feel of something digging into the bridge of her nose.

When she pulls away, frantically blinking through the pain, Mindfang is quick to laugh and kiss her forehead. Rosa opens her eyes, slowly, and is greeted by a pair of keen blue eyes, sparkling with innocuous excitement behind a pair of glasses.

Oh dear. Oh dear look at her. She's so precious. Rosa loves the glasses. The woman is probably wearing them just so she didn't get punched for waking her girlfriend up.

She's braided her hair back into a single long plait-- however, it almost looks like she threw her hair in the general direction of 'center' instead of carefully weaving it like how it's meant to go. Either way, there's a sky-blue ribbon tied into a floppy bow at the end of it which makes Rosa absolutely sure she's just trying to avoid getting punched. Rosa slumps back against the headboard, doing her best not to coo and inform Mindfang just how adorable she is.

There isn't any justice in the world if such a brilliantly devious woman can also be so darling. She looks as if she should be sitting in the formal dining room downstairs eagerly scarfing down a croissant while consulting with her shiny new moirail about what they're going to do on the last day of their holiday together. Instead, she's doing her best to take advantage of a woman who's wholly at a disadvantage and is probably also anticipating a day of languid lovemaking and just a little emotional blackmail.

All of which she's going to do while looking like she could easily have been the face model for every
porcelain doll ever. All she's missing is the passably groomed hair-- and even that could be excused as the work of a particularly haphazard child's play.

"Why am I always the naked one?" Rosa asks, blearily, reaching up to push her own hair out of her face. From the way it feels it must look awful, matted with dried sweat from the night before and cemented in place after a night spent tossing and turning.

Mindfang gets comfortable on the mattress beside her, dragging the breakfast tray close enough that they both can reach it. She passes Rosa a quarter of a waffle laden with powdered sugar and butter--Rosa stares at it blankly, wondering why the hell Mindfang would think that's finger food. Hasn't she heard of syrup?

She takes her sweet time responding to Rosa's, pouring herself a cup of tea fragrant with a lusty bergamot. Rosa can taste the bitterness from the aroma alone; she watches, sleepily, as Mindfang stirs in one too many spoonfuls of sugar then swears when she pours in too much cream. "Perhaps because one of us is a pirate queen and one of us is a sex slave and certain behavioral standards are attached to each position."

"Such as my scheming to strangle you post-coitus?" Rosa says under her breath, half-hoping Mindfang will miss the comment even while incredibly cognizant she can't fail to hear. The words send a rush of adrenaline into her system, toes tingling, throat tightening and chest buzzing like a horde of bees whose honey had been disturbed by a particularly incompetent picnicker.

Mindfang tosses her braid over her shoulder and gives Rosa a jaguar's smile, all fangs and heady intention. She tears into a croissant with a vicious rip, the pastry ripping apart into two ragged pieces, one poor end hanging from her mouth while the other is crushed in her hand.

"Yes. That is definitely one of those standards. Just as I'm subsequently expected to lock you up below decks after said attempt fails and let you languish at my mercy."

She might have well as said hint her voice is so laden with innuendo. Rosa makes a face and leans over to see whether or not there's syrup available; the waffle is, as expected, less than entirely enticing without anything to go with it.

"Because you would definitely make it twenty minutes before realizing that you don't know where I put your laundry." Rosa reminds her in a lame attempt to restore their awkward status quo that never addresses the fact that she is a slave because that makes this uncomfortable and icky.

"You do my laundry?" Mindfang asks incredulously, nearly choking on a mouthful of hazelnut spread that she's eating off a knife. There's way too much wrong with that for Rosa to care. "What the fuck, Rosa, why do you do my laundry?"

This woman needs to be smacked. And not in a sexual fashion. "...Who did you think was washing your clothes?"

"I don't waste time worrying about things like that." Mindfang sniffs dismissively, rolling her eyes. "That's what I have you for."

"Exactly. You have me to clean your cabin, make your bed, do your laundry, bring you food and dress you." Rosa fills one of the empty teacups with syrup and holds it close to her chest as she begins to eat, ravenous the second that the scent of maple hits her nose. What's the worst that might happen-- she'll get syrup on her breasts?

"No, I have you for companionship. You just like cleaning so I let you do it." Mindfang speaks as if
Rosa has just fallen down a rather steep mountain face and she's the first medic on the scene, testing to see if she's stable enough to escape immediate culling.

Rosa narrows her eyes and growls when Mindfang goes in for a kiss. Mindfang is persistent, however, and doesn't stop getting in close to her face, settling for leaving yet another love bite on her neck when Rosa proves far too talented at hiding her lips. "I was unaware of this fact. Thank you so much for laying down clear behavioral expectations when you purchased me. It has been invaluable for the past few months in orienting myself to my new social status."

"Really? Because you seem *quite* comfortable with your position from where I'm sitting." Mindfang mutters, the slightest hint of commentary in her voice-- Rosa doesn't know quite what she's referencing but it's probably nothing *good*.

"Is that a threat?" She asks, quietly, after a long pause to finish her waffle quarter.

"I'm not at all adverse to corporal punishment, you know." Mindfang reminds her with a chuckle, lowering her eyebrows ominously behind the rims of her glasses.

Rosa snorts then rolls her eyes. Nope. She's not serious. She's a pirate but she's not serious. "Neither am I."

"So I noticed. It is a very useful fact to have in my repertoire."
Mindfang purrs, slipping a hand up Rosa's thigh and digging her nails into her flesh while giving her a very suggestive smirk. Rosa yelps and she lets go, kindly.

"Don't make me have sex. Everything hurts." She grimaces and holds her wrists up to illustrate the point. They aren't any worse than they've been in the past-- in fact, total life experience considered, last night was probably somewhere towards the bottom of the 'painfully tied up' list. It didn't even hurt at the time. But this morning she's definitely missing some skin and it is less than pleasant.

Mindfang sighs pityingly and finishes her cup of tea, reaching up to stroke the back of Rosa's neck possessively. Despite herself, Rosa shivers a little and slumps into her. Ohhhh, that is nice. That is very nice. "You poor baby. Was I too hard on you?"

"No. But that doesn't mean I'm not sore." Rosa mumbles in what she hopes is a pathetic way. Nope. Nope she doesn't want to play with the pirate right now. She does not want to play with the pirate whatsoever. She wants to cuddle her lover and sleep.

"My poor little pet," Mindfang coos, seizing one of her hands and kissing it by way of apology. Rosa rolls her eyes. Yes, pathetic status achieved. Pirate retreating. "I'm sorry. I'll patch you up when we're done eating, hmm?"

Rosa nods in agreement. There isn't any way she's going to say no to that; her wrists are a virulent green where the rope had rubbed her the wrong way, it *hurts* to be sitting and she could really use some ice for her breasts right about now because *someone* doesn't understand piercing etiquette very well.

Not that she was particularly good about stopping Mindfang from using her nipple rings as chew toys. Rosa's nook twitches at the recollection of just *how* she came to be covered in tooth marks; the sensation of Mindfang's teeth closing around her nipple rings more than makes up for the lingering pain the morning after. Mind you, that doesn't mean that she's going to say no to being fretted over. Vienna is good at spoiling her-- especially when she feels guilty-- and Rosa's reasonably sure she's going to get a decent amount of cuddling out of this. But she also doesn't want her to panic to the point that they don't try this again because getting tied up and very thoroughly made love to was
quite nice. And Mindfang was polite about it, too. She might not always be but-- well-- last night she was.

Mindfang keeps rubbing her neck with a skilled hand. Rosa curls against her sleepily, idly considering eating the rest of their breakfast. She really wants to eat something right about now. More food would be very nice. But that also requires moving and she's currently indulging her newfound adoration for massage so waffles have much less of their usual allure.

"Are you all right, Pet? Really?" Mindfang asks, absently, squeezing Rosa's neck one last time for good measure before removing her hand. Rosa whines but it doesn't undo the gesture. "Are you upset about anything last night? Anything at all?"

Rosa closes her eyes to consider the question in relative privacy. Closing her eyes and ignoring Mindfang really is the most privacy she gets these days, so it's not hard to do. Is she upset about last night? Tied up, spanked, roughed around-- coerced into consenting to oral sex-- she should really be a little upset.

But she isn't. Not really. Perhaps a little bit of her brain, somewhere, wants to tell Mindfang she really needs to become a better listener... but she also wasn't that earnest in her complaints, so she'll let it slide. She probably shouldn't, but she will. The one thing that actually rankles is-- well-- how did she do?

"I... I didn't disappoint you last night, did I?" Rosa asks, quietly, not daring to look Mindfang in the eyes while her question is considered.

"No, Pet. Not at all." Mindfang isn't at all stymied by this question; she doesn't miss as much as a millisecond before she switches to condescending comfort mode. She kisses her cheek. Rosa screws up her face and tries not to feel like a kitten. "You were so wonderful, so brave-- so-- well... tantalizing doesn't do it justice, does it?"

Mindfang sounds proud. That's nice to hear. Rosa cracks open her eyes and peers at her anxiously. Mindfang doesn't seem at all like she's jesting. Rosa sits up a little more and tries to regain some semblance of self-confidence. "I don't know. I can't gauge how well I'm doing-- I've never done anything like last night before. I-- I hope I didn't do anything wrong."

"No, of course not. Did I do anything wrong? Or was there something you liked?"

"You are being uncomfortably courteous for a woman who owns me, you know. I don't quite know what to do about this."

"I'm trying to make this kinky sex instead of uncomfortable coercion! Don't be mean, Rosa, or I'll eat the rest of your breakfast."

"I thought this was for both of us. Is this just my breakfast?"

"No. I was just trying to threaten you. I'm quite hungry. It takes just as much work to get someone off as it does to get off you know. And you're a biter."

Rosa can't argue with that. So instead she just reaches up and rubs her fingertips along the collar of bruises that ring her neck-- making eye contact with Mindfang the entire time. It's an impossibly intense experience between the sex-evoking pain and the cheery arousal that brightens Mindfang's face when she realized they're both thinking of the same exact thing.

Mindfang reaches out and curls a hand around her neck, rocking her fingertips. Rosa moans-- oh my is that lovely. Mmmm. Oh dear now she's getting excited again. "My darling girl, you draw blood
when you bite. *I* just do it the sexy way. The 'remember last night?' sort of way."

"You're very proud you managed to get me off last night, aren't you?" Rosa laughs, awkwardly, and rolls her eyes. She drags their breakfast tray over and steals another waffle.

"Excuse me? I didn't just get you off I *blew your mind* and I went down on you, Annora." Mindfang picks up the bowl of syrup and holds it up. Rosa eyes her, warily, and then accepts the offering. Even Mindfang must know better than to pour syrup all over her lover. "Do not give me this skeptical 'got me off' bullshit."

"Wait, am I supposed to be inordinately grateful over you performing an act of oral sex? I don't quite know how this works, Captain." Rosa gives her as mischievous a smile as she can muster.

"I mean. No. But oral sex is the best, isn't it?"

"I'm not quite at the point in my sexual career where I can judge the various forms of intercourse." Oh heavens this is a delectable breakfast. Mindfang needs to be thanked by means of being soundly kissed.

But not right now, perhaps. Right now she deserves to feel less than catered to. It's Rosa's turn to get spoiled for a bit.

"I am going to kick you out of bed if you don't tell me how great I am at sexual intercourse *immediately.*" Mindfang yanks the syrup away, scowling. Rosa glares back. Damnit, she's hungry.

"You need to be *told*? Look at how exhausted I am! Look at how many bruises I've got and how little I've complained!"

"You're complaining *now* which makes up for it." Mindfang grumbles.

Rosa shrugs. "I refuse to indulge your ego any more than it needs to be."

Mindfang steals her lips again, straining her neck and twining her fingers through Rosa's hair. She allows herself to be pulled close once again, shifting like a glacier until their bodies fit together comfortably, leg draped over Mindfang's knees, hands around her shoulders. Neither of them seems particularly over-ardent which is shocking because, well, shouldn't they be? But this is just as exhilarating as the idea of becoming... intimate with her pirate, a lazy sort of love making that's sweet and warm and wholly unrushed by anything. There's no pressure to move forward or anxiety over the unknown, just the languid feeling of being curled up against a beautiful woman charged with no task save to continue kissing her.

Mindfang breaks the kiss with a happy sigh, resting her head against Rosa's chest. Rosa reaches up and combs her fingers through Mindfang's still-damp curls. She purrs and nuzzles closer, her lips pressing to Rosa's throat in an expression of gratitude.

"You should really let me brush your hair, Mistress," Rosa mumbles sleepily. "It would be so lovely if you'd just--"

"You're killing the mood."

Rosa laughs, rolling her eyes. Mindfang smells like paradise, a rich cacophony of flowers with just a few nicely scented herbs thrown in for good measure.

"Fuck you're gorgeous." Mindfang mutters, her eyes slipping shut. "Any sane creature would *kill* to share your bed."
Rosa snuggles into her side and smiles, warmly. With the chill of the sea breeze blowing across them it feels good to be this close, her head nestled against Mindfang's breasts. She sort of feels it's safer to have her teeth close to Mindfang's breasts instead of Mindfang's teeth close to her breasts. "Lucky for you that wasn't necessary."

"Mmmmmm might as well have been. Do you understand how much work it was to get you to give up that stainless maidenhood of yours? It was easier for me to steal the Heiress’s tiara than it was for me to get between your legs."

"...You stole the heiress's tiara?"

"Yes and your virginity was still the most difficult thing I've ever stolen!" Mindfang laughs from her belly. Her breasts shake with the effort as does the her stomach, hips and thighs-- anywhere that muscle hasn't won out. She's so darling. Watching her loll about the mattress laughing, robe tangled around her, Rosa's not entirely sure how this woman manages a fleet of pirate ships because, on occasion, she can be too cute for words.

But then she also has to take a moment to wonder why she's been single for so long because she really is gorgeous. So perfectly lovely-- almost every square foot of her. There are a few inches here and there that aren't entirely pleasant, mostly the places where she's been either burned or scarred or bitten and the sights of her mottled flesh makes her own twinge in sympathy.

"Does that make my maidenhood more valuable than the crown jewels?"

"Define value. Personal value? Oh hell yeah, the risk to reward ratio was much better. Marketable value...? I mean, I had to spend a lot to money for you and your shit, I didn't have to spend money to steal the damn thing."

Rosagrimaces at the mention of having been bought, but Mindfang ignores her completely.

"Mind you, I do have the option of resale with you. For a smaller price since you have been pretty well deflowered by now--"

"I'm not sure I have. You might have to prove it to me."

"You keep insulting my sexual prowess. I don't know what you're thinking you're going to get out of it, but--"

"My study of the pirate species has led me to believe that they are usually incredibly skilled in bed and have interesting sexual proclivities." Rosa runs her hand down Mindfang's body, curling her fingers into the lush roundness of Mindfang's hip. She rubs her thumb over the protuberance of her hipbone and giggles when Mindfang jerks away, clearly ticklish. "While you are, indeed, a very accomplished lover, I haven't experienced anything I wouldn't consider to be 'standard'."

"What do you want, huh? For me to buy a parrot? Teach it how to talk dirty? Tie you to a ship's mast and rip your back open with a cat 'o nine tails? Rub salt in the wounds? Drink more rum?"

"You're purposefully making this unattractive. I'm going to leave." Rosa sniffs, sitting up and throwing her legs over the edge of the mattress.

Mindfang lunges, grabbing the chain hanging around her neck. It's gold filigree and won't stand up to too much abuse. Rosa stops trying to escape immediately, despite being wholly aware Mindfang can afford to replace a simple chain. She wasn't that determined to go anyways. It's cold outside of their bed and she really wants to snuggle back under the duvet and enjoy lounging around.
"Ohhhhhhh, no you don't--" Mindfang purrs threateningly, pulling her backwards by the waist. She covers Rosa's neck in playful kisses. Rosa giggles and lets herself be wrestled onto the mattress. Mindfang settles in astride her hips "You're not going to be naughty and then just run off."

"Why not?"

"Because I want an excuse to cover you in syrup and see how much you squirm."

"Don't you dare, Vienna--" Rosa hisses, struggling to free herself. "You are not making me your breakfast--"

"I already had breakfast. Now I'm going to have some sticky, uncomfortable sex with a very willing partner."

"Vienna, please--"

"You can't insinuate that you haven't been properly deflowered and then get upset when I decide to prove that you have been by doing so again." Mindfang growls, shoving her back down. Rosa flops onto the mattress with a thin lipped glower.

"You have to be joking--" Rosa protests as Mindfang reaches for their breakfast tray, menacingly. "Vienna! You wouldn't dare!"

"Watch me." Mindfang growls, narrowing her eyes as if Rosa has just informed her she's not capable of sailing around the world in less than a month and is about to hop on the nearest ship and set sail without stocking up.

Rosa shrieks and prays for mercy.

* * *

Mercy is not forthcoming. Rosa spends the better part of a very uncomfortable hour whining while Mindfang attempts to lick every last remnant of maple syrup off her breast. She is not amused. She's aroused, but not amused. If there is one thing that life has failed to take away from her, it's her enjoyment of being clean. The best part about being with Mindfang has been the ability to bathe on a regular basis. Being covered in syrup is her idea of hell, frankly. The licking isn't the worst, mind you. Mindfang's good with her tongue. And she's even considerate enough not to pour anything onto her still-irritated nipples. That would be an awful infection to deal with. Probably.

Things do not, surprisingly, devolve into sex; Rosa eventually gives up attempting to reason with Mindfang and just grabs her by the collar of her dressing gown. Mindfang laughs into her mouth as her nightgown clings to Rosa's still-sticky skin and kisses her back. They spend an inordinate amount of time twined around one another, awkwardly twining one another while pretending that Rosa isn't disgustingly in need of a shower.

It feels admittedly heavenly to do nothing but savor the chance to relax, half asleep, in an overpriced hotel suite with a bed that is absolutely worth the incredibly high price.

"You're filthy," Mindfang purrs, grinning wickedly widely. "We should really go clean you up."

Rosa sighs and stretches out, pillowing her cheek on her arm. Mindfang makes a noise of indulgent affection reaching up to rub Rosa's horns. "I'm tired, Vienna."
Mindfang rolls her eyes and huffs. She smacks Rosa's still-sugary stomach. Her hand sticks as she draws it away and Rosa gets the point. "Oh, it's sooooooo hard to take a shower. I'm incredibly apologetic that I even deigned to suggest it."

"You and I both know you'd turn it into sex within seconds." Rosa grumbles, lifting her head to indulge in Mindfang's affectionate scratching. Ohh that's nice. Mmmm that's nice.

"I already took my shower, so your virtue will remain intact." Mindfang says, dramatically, tossing her braid over her shoulder. It smacks Rosa in the face and, yes, her hair is slightly damp and smells clean. "So to speak. I have a certain... individual to visit and I don't know how the two of you will get along so I might have to leave you to it--"

"I'm going back to bed." Rosa grumbles, pressing her face into her pillow. It's an effective way of hiding the fact that she's grinding her teeth hard enough to sharpen a sword. She can't quite tell if Mindfang is, for once, attempting to be considerate or if this is a deliberate attempt to get her ire up.

If the latter, the attempt is nauseatingly honed; Rosa had never considered herself to be a spiteful lover until she met Mindfang. The business with the Orphaner had brought that side of her to daylight-- she'd rather hoped, however, that particular anger was due more to her poor treatment at his hands and not her own personality.

"And if you're trying to make me angry by insinuating you're on your way to see another woman... I won't speak to you for the rest of the day." Rosa attempts to counter her own urges and fails, spectacularly. Mindfang laughs.

"If you go back to bed, you'll never know if I'm cheating on you or not." Mindfang says, primly, letting her robe crumple on the ground. She's still wearing that obnoxiously awful nightgown, white lace and satin that's got a neckline far too high and a hem too low. "And I'm rather well-known for stretching the truth, you know."

Stretching it? Doesn't she mean sanding it down, repainting it and adding a layer of gold leaf so thick you can barely tell what lies beneath? Half the time she might as well be spinning stories from silken strands plucked out of the stars to forge a yarn that's nothing but a hazy filament but somehow manages to withstand the agonies of time.

Rosa simply sighs from her nose instead of saying any of this, and drags herself off the mattress. The duvet slides onto the floor along with the sheets. She groans audibly this time and stoops to pick them up, wincing as sore muscles are forced to move in ways they don't want to and her bare breasts shift with the gravitational pull.

"...Well. Um. Perhaps I've got a few minutes to spare." Mindfang says, slowly, clearing her throat. "If, of course, you're willing to let me make it up to you that is."

She straightens, slowly, making a show of it while praying she's correct in assuming that was a 'oh dear I'm suddenly aroused' throat clearing. Rosa tosses the blankets back on the bed and crosses her arms around her breasts, hefting them up a little higher while hiding some of her scars. "Make what up to me, exactly? You have many things to apologize for, Captain."

Mindfang is quick to get to her side, scrambling across the bed. Rosa stares at her, incredulous, as Mindfang pulls off her glasses and unfastens her braid in one fell swoop. Within moments she goes from sweet, affectionate young lover to... well... the lying, predatory bitch she sort of actually is. Not that Rosa really minds the bitchy part. Nothing wrong with that. The points in her life where she decided 'fuck all' and was the bitchy one herself have been the highlights, really.
"You want me to be specific?" Yes, she would. Very much so. Rosa's neck blazes with a dusky emerald hue as Mindfang nuzzles into her, hot breath a dizzying contrast to her icy skin pressing to Rosa's own. "Okay, *Pet*, I want to make up for defiling you. Repeatedly."

"Yes, well, that *is* an offense punishable by death." Rosa pants a little, making the choice to ignore her jealousy in favor of a more enjoyable past time. I'm sure you can find a way to convince me not to report it, though."

"Mmmm yes, I'm sure we can make an arrangement." Mindfang chuckles and hoists Rosa into her arms. Rosa yelps and wraps her legs around Mindfang's waist, recognizing at this point in her life with her that fighting her off will be near impossible. "Like the one where in return for sex, I don't turn you in for being a revolutionary criminal."

Rosa can't help it. Mindfang's too gorgeous, too ridiculously tempting for Rosa to ignore. She smirks and wraps her arms around Mindfang's neck, chalking it up as a victory when Mindfang moans at Rosa's naked breasts pressing against her shoulders. If you can't beat them, join them-- right? "Touché, Captain."

Mindfang giggles and starts towards the bathroom. She pauses right before they stumble inside. "...Just to be clear, I will rip out the still beating heart of anyone who even remotely considers taking you away from me."

"Thank you." Rosa snorts, rolling her eyes. "Don't worry. It's nothing personal, I'm just very selfish. And you are nothing if not a treasure."

"...Thank you." She murmurs, sincerely this time. Mindfang preens. Within moments, of course, the halcyon hum of a lovely compliment is ripped from her; Mindfang all but throws her into the shower and turns the water on far too warm; the soap ends up halfway across the room and they bicker for ten minutes about who will be forced to retrieve it--

But she's right about one thing, of course. There is something here to be treasured. No matter how awful things end up being in the end. Perhaps that's something she should remember more often. Pay attention to the memorable moments of happiness and not set herself up for doom.

She would be happier, after all, if she took a moment to realize how lovely life is for the moment instead of... complaining about it all. Mindfang shoves her under the shower spray and she's broken from her reverie immediately to bicker with her.

* * *

They aren't ready to leave the hotel until lunchtime, forgoing the in-house meal at Mindfang's promise to find an even better place near the harbor. Rosa accepts this promise, along with the implication that they are, in fact, going to visit a *ship* instead of another woman... but still doesn't quite trust her.

Rosa finds her way into a simple gray dress and then finds her way back out of it when Mindfang decides she *hates that color*. She tries a black one next, to similar results, and then finally wins with a hunter green number and a light cardigan. Mindfang dresses in some of her pirate clothes which Rosa is surprisingly happy to see; the sight of her in her ridiculously flourishing petticoats and black velvet overcoat is, well... almost nostalgic.

The only thing missing is her hat. Before they leave the room, Rosa offers to retrieve it-- but Mindfang just laughs and shakes her head.
"There's only so much attention I need in the course of a day, Pet," Mindfang chuckles, rolling her eyes as she unlocks their hotel room door. "And I get all I need from you at the moment. And that hat makes it far too obvious that I'm a pirate lass."

"You are not anyone's definition of a 'lass'. Wench, perhaps." Rosa teases, yanking on Mindfang's coat collar in an attempt to straighten it.

Mindfang raises her eyebrows and smirks. "I'd slap you if I didn't feel so proud right at this moment."

"I've learned from the best, Captain," Rosa purrs and Mindfang abandons all pretenses to kiss her quite soundly. It's beatifically romantic, Mindfang swooping her back and Rosa clinging to her neck in order to keep from falling over.

Ohhhh yes. That's lovely. Rosa moans against her lips. Mindfang ignores this and keeps kissing her. It's a first for them. Kissing in the hallway, that is. Or, well, maybe it isn't? Usually they're both rather inclined to remain in the privacy of their quarters. But there isn't exactly anyone around to be offended, so why not?

Rosa clings to her and prays Mindfang won't sneeze and end up spilling her flat on the floor. That seems like something that might happen, all things considered.

But Mindfang doesn't let her crash down. She sweeps her back up in a flurry of green cotton and their laughter. "Come along, Annora. Let's go visit your competition, shall we?"

Rosa grimaces but does, indeed, come along. They make it almost all the way out of the hotel before their attention is attracted by the concierge scurrying after them.

"Pardon me, Marquise-- your Ladyship--" He adds, with a hasty bow in Rosa's direction (which she things is rather sweet). "But there, erm, been something brought to my attention that I unfortunately feel is my duty to pass along."

Mindfang freezes, as does Rosa. They stare at him, both equally horrified—although for what Rosa assumes are vastly different reasons. Mindfang is most likely concerned with having been caught for piracy or Rosa's having been recognized. Rosa is simply caught up in a flurry of pre-guilt for what she's going to have to do to him to keep his mouth shut. Oh dear, he's such a nice man.

"There has, um, been a complaint from your neighbors. They were rather... disturbed by the noise last evening, it would appear."

He makes an extremely awkward gesture with his horns towards an older looking couple sitting in a pair of armchairs. The female troll is glowering at them as if she thinks her glare can somehow erase the memory of being kept up all night listening to her neighbors have extremely ebullient sexual congress. The woman's partner is studiously absorbed in the newspaper, only the twitching of his jaw betraying that he's at all involved in the situation.

"What." Mindfang says, horrified. Her eyes widen into an expression of hysterically scandalized innocence, like she's attempting to say 'who, me? never!' with her eyebrows. As her hackles rise defensively, Rosa's own quickly recede. Oh, it's just someone pissed off about sex noises? That's easy enough to handle. She was anticipating being arrested for treason charges.

Rosa smiles, sweetly. "Well. To be fair. She was going down on me for the first time. It seemed rude not to show my appreciation. But in the future I'm sure we'll be more than happy to invest in a gag, won't we dear?"

"Get in the car." Mindfang yelps, shoving her hard. Rosa stumbles towards the front door with a
smug smile. The poor concierge is left standing in the middle of the room with a look of abject horror on his face.

Horrifying Mindfang is her new favorite thing, Rosa decides. It's probably going to be incredibly hard to manage on a daily basis, but she can try.

"You're ridiculous. How could you--"

"May I remind you, Captain, that you were the one dragging the aforementioned noises from my throat?" Rosa says, sweetly, raising her eyebrows. They climb into the backseat of the waiting car, Mindfang shoving her inside. Rosa retreats to the far end of the seat, elegantly crossing her ankles together.

Mindfang sits across the seat from her, each of them leaning against their own window.

"I didn't think I needed to tell you that one does not discuss their sex life outside of the bedroom."

"He started it."

"Yes, and generally one ends such discussions by getting affronted, pretending that you have not nor would ever do such a thing and crying if necessary."

"You're really uncomfortable about this, aren't you? I'm amazing. Which one of us is the committed virgin, again? I feel like it's me, but I could be wrong about that."

"Annora. Cease and desist." Mindfang snaps, hitting the 's' as hard as... Well. As hard as she fucked her last night. No, that's too crass. It's more of the sharp sound of teeth sinking into an apple and the flesh of the fruit being ripped away, slowly.

Rosa rolls her eyes and crosses her legs neatly at the ankles. "Of course. In the future I will be sure to firmly assert nothing but negative things about our lovemaking."

"Don't be difficult. You know I'm the best you've ever had." Mindfang raps sharply on the glass partitioning off the driver from the backseat. The car takes off smoothly-- much nicer than the one from the other night. Mindfang might prefer a carriage but cars certainly drive much nicer. Plus, there aren't any horses involved.

"You're all I've ever had so that's hardly an accolade." Rosa reminds her, reaching up and smoothing her hair off her face. It's about time to trim it again-- should she ask Mindfang to do that? Considering that the woman can't even brush her hair properly, probably not. Her fingers linger on Mindfang's temple and she smiles a little.

Mindfang, thankfully, smiles back.

* * *

It's easy to discern which ship is Mindfang's 'favorite girl' from the moment they exit the car. The rumble of the engine is agonizingly loud in the quiet space, clearly indicating that this part of the coast has only accepted the amenities that make life more luxurious; electric light, indoor plumbing and the like, while rejecting the swiftly developing technologies the Empire has adopted.

They're in a blissfully beautiful harbor, a placid, calm place where the more noble (or just plain bold) citizens are lazily basking in the waves of spring-blue water slipping across the sands. It's a small harbor, with just enough sandbars across its depths to keep the water from dashing the ships against the wall. The pier goes at least six hundred meters out before they can board the ship. The entire
shipyard only has three visitors; Mindfang's ship and two smaller vessels with tattered sails and decks in dire need of refinishing. It's clearly a very small, very exclusive business.

"There she is, my darling!" Mindfang crows, shaking off her malaise like a cat would her paws when walking through the snow. Rosa beams despite herself, the sea air swelling into her lungs and rushing out in a whoosh like the sloshing of water over rocks.

She dashes out across the docks in a flurry of elegant skirts, petticoats trimmed in blue and silver swishing everywhere, boot heels clipping like horses hooves across salt-stained wood that doesn't look strong enough to hold even a newborn colt. Despite the fact that she's inches away from plummeting in the ocean she's rushing along heedlessly, thoughtlessly, face fixed on the horizon. There's something to be embraced about that attitude. Rosa tries, but instead finds herself unable to stop thinking about how little she wants to be breathing water and how cold it must be. Still, she makes it to the ship just a minute after her far more confident seafaring lover.

Mindfang's waving furiously and shouting in another language at a solitary figure on the deck. She's heard Mindfang speak in different languages before but only in short snippets-- the usual niceties that even she herself knows. Never a tirade like this, words pouring out of her throat in a jumble of crudely scrawled letters that, to the trained ear, strung together and waved like a white flag: 'I surrender my language to your own!'

The woman-- because, surprisingly, it is a woman on board-- pads across the deck, wordlessly hefting a ladder over the side. Rosa flinches, bodily, at the realization she's going to have to climb instead of stroll up the gangplank as usual.

Mindfang leaps onto the ladder, slamming into the hull of her ship. She 'oofs' painfully but is quick to scramble up the rungs, her boots not once. Rosa isn't quick to follow. She's not one for climbing and it's hardly ladylike. What if she falls? What if she rips her dress? No, thank you."

"Rossssa! Rosa, come on already, Pet!" Mindfang yells, her voice taking on a harbor cadence with ease. Her voice is brash now, like the clanging of brass cathedral bells instead of the sonorous ring of a silver chime.

"I'm going to have a look at... Her first." Rosa deliberately uses the correct pronoun and Mindfang, now looming over the ship's rail gives her a searching look. "I don't know how to swim, Captain, where am I going to go?"

Mindfang accepts this a truth but still scowls. "If you're not on board in five minutes I'm going to lock you in my cabin."

"Of course, Captain." Rosa murmurs, wondering if a salute is a proper answer. But instead she gives Mindfang a glowing smile. Mindfang turns on her heel and dashes across the deck without another thought.

There's a pang of betrayal that rises, unbidden, like the tide. But Rosa swallows it. She strolls down the pier with her hands folded before her, staring up at the ship above her. It feels unnaturally large; surely this ship's much bigger than the Widow, isn't it?

The sails snap in the wind, suddenly, and she jolts at the sound. She's not used to it anymore. She misses being used to it and turns her face to the sea wind, forcing herself to breathe in deeply through her nose. Rosa counts her steps as she walks, trying to guess how far she's gone since the ladder. It's a useless endeavor; she keeps getting distracted by how the hull of this ship shines and smells of beeswax underneath the salt, or how surreal it feels to be back on the ocean.
She reaches the edge of the dock and stands, awkwardly, out at the open ocean. There's waves crashing knots out, an island barely visible. It scares her, the sight of so much open space. So much unpredictable space, a terrain that's constantly changing in a frequently-successful attempt to bring sailors to their graves. Rosa wonders if Mindfang has ever considered taking up a career as a siren. She'd be good at it, at least with the low bloods and the highbloods who are easily distracted.

Rosa likes that mental image. Mindfang, lazing about on a sandbar completely naked, covered in sailor's tattoos (which she certainly is not in real life), reading poetry aloud so tantalizingly that ship after ship crashes.

Ooh. Now she's got a very powerful urge to see Mindfang heavily tattooed. The woman clearly needs more piercings. And a few tattoos. She'd love to see that. So very much.

"One minute to go!" Mindfang roars from behind her. Rosa turns, sharply-- barely manages to keep her balance-- and gapes. Mindfang's hanging over the railing at the prow, her hair swinging in the wind. Once again she doesn't wait to see if she's obeyed; that would be silly. Of course Rosa will listen.

She sighs and turns, shielding her eyes from the sun with one hand. She stares up at the sails, white and pristine in the morning wind. The masts, tall and proud, and a cerulean blue flag flickering lazily in the ocean breeze. It's the only indication that it's a pirate ship.

Well. That and the fact that the ship's figurehead is a very naked woman. Rosa's face immediately colors to a shade just a few yellow tones away from grass. Oh dear. Oh dear there's a naked woman on Mindfang's ship. A naked woman painted gold with blue hair and painted eyes but... she's still naked.

Oh dear. She's not quite sure how she feels about this. Other than a little happy that Mindfang's interest in women is so pronounced on board this ship. She hasn't seen Mindfang with women that much.

"ROSA," comes the howl from om board the ship. She leans over the railing, once more, and catches Rosa's horrified face. "Oh come now, Pet, don't be scandalized so!"

"There's a naked woman on your ship."

"Yes, darling. And there's probably going to be more very soon."

"Is that a threat, Captain?" Rosa shouts back. "Because it's not having the intended effect."

Rosa edges away from the figurehead slowly, gaining speed as she goes. The ladder seems much less daunting now that she knows that she's running from something; Rosa drags herself up it, more than a little painfully-- she's not built for climbing and the worn wooden runs and the rope that's seen more of the high seas than she are rough beneath her hands.

Mindfang's waiting at the top of the ladder. She grabs Rosa by the waist and hauls her up. Rosa's happy for it; she's glad, mostly because her dress doesn't allow for that sort of climbing motion. She's beginning to see why Mindfang's always in flouncy skirts if she's not in breeches; there's a bit more flexibility there.

She sets Rosa down like she's a sandcastle, her hands lingering on Rosa's hips until she's sure Rosa can stand on her own. She can feel the ground beneath her feet start to move the moment she's on board and trying compensate for it is far beyond her ability.

There's a sleek, sinuous way to the way she moves on board her ship, constantly compensating for
the bobbing deck with an ease that can only be learned, not bred. Rosa's unsure on her feet once more, barely able to remember how in the world she did this for so long without falling overboard.

Despite all the shelter and the calm and the luxuriousness of this stretch of the ocean, the Selcis is still constantly shifting, like sands on a desert dune blown out from beneath her feet by a particularly wicked wind hoping to see her drown among the shattered bones of boulders long-dead. Which is really just a silly way to say that climbing aboard a ship once more gives her the same feeling in the depths of her stomach that she had when she slipped into the desert with her son in her arms, feeling the fresh night air and the reflective glow of the moon on her skin for the first time in decades.

It's a nervous feeling, the feeling that she's lost control of everything and is now simply along for the ride. Which, of course, she is. She knows nothing about sailing, or the maintenance of a ship and hardly can say she knows a lot about pirate society. Mindfang doesn't show that side to her very often. She desperately tries to hide it, but Rosa always knows it's there, a quiet, lurking thing—not necessarily a bad thing, but something akin to a too-skinny cat that's incessantly miauing for scraps. You can shoo it away, you can put it in a close but nothing will keep you from eventually heeding its demands.

It frightens her how quickly she's forgotten how to be a proper sailor. How can she even pretend to do that? When Mindfang attempts to pull away, Rosa throws her arms around her neck. It's not very ladylike, of course, but... she isn't quite a lady, is she?

"Poor Pet," Mindfang murmurs, cradling her close. "Don't have your sea legs back yet?"

"Just a little overwhelmed by it all, I think," Rosa murmurs, breathing in the way her perfume melds with the sea air like it's the holiest of incense. Except it's not because incense always makes her sneeze. It's always been a problem—and the main reason she wasn't invited to bless many services.

You only need to have an explosive sneezing fit in the middle of one highblood's matespritship ceremony to get booted out of that job. And a coughing attack in the middle of a cremation doesn't look to good either. Only thing that kept her alive after that one was the Grand Highblood's intervention. And by intervention she means 'started laughing so hard everyone followed suit and no one murdered her'.

The door to Mindfang's cabin has been painted an intense cobalt blue, like gemstone in paint form. There's a small square of glass set into it right at the center, but that's been painted over too, in a warm, gleaming gold. Well, that's clever. It'll keep the light from waking them up in the morning.

Rosa glows at how wonderful it feels to think 'them'. She likes that word.

There's a lantern hanging just above the door, swinging rhythmically as she ship rocks. Is that a good idea? The light or the fire, that is? She'd hate to be caught aboard a burning ship. There's no light in the lantern right now, of course. The sunlight's pouring down on them in droves, strong enough to singe the skin. But Rosa stares at it like a moth in the desert evening, at the lantern and the door. Now that's a little more... pirate-y. Is that a word? No. No, it isn't. Ugh.

"I'm going to go talk to Elenor. Take a look around. Don't go anywhere." Mindfang says, mildly menacingly. Rosa jolts back from her. "And don't faint!"

She says that a bit more kindly, absentely stroking Rosa's cheek. Rosa takes a deep breath and then lets it out. "I'm not going to faint. You don't need to worry--"

Rosa pauses mid-sentence, frowning so deeply that her incisors dig into her bottom lip. She's never heard Mindfang speak another woman's name with any form of affection. Her fear that there's
another woman in Mindfang's life and she is, in fact, not wholly special is instant and nauseating.

"Who the hell is Elenor?" Rosa asks, brusquely, lunging for Mindfang and grabbing her arm. She yanks, hard, when Mindfang keeps walking.

She pauses and gives Rosa a charmingly bewildered stare, the look akin to something you'd see on a puppy who just can't quite understand what it means to 'sit'.

"Who. Is. Elenor." Rosa repeats, slowly. Mindfang furrows her brows-- Rosa resists the urge to punch her. The moment passes the moment Mindfang breaks into a charming grin.

She readily nuzzles into Rosa's side, resting her chin on her collarbone. "I can't tell if your jealousy is gratifying or heartbreaking. Do you really not trust me, my dear?"

"No." Rosa says, without pause. Mindfang frowns-- for just an eighth of a second. Then she sighs, more dramatically than she needs to.

"You're awful. Elenor's my shipbuilder. She fixes my ships when I inevitably destroy them." Mindfang makes a weird hand gesture over her shoulder then makes a pained face-- probably because her arm is not, in fact, meant to twist at that angle. Poor dear.

A woman emerges from the wheelhouse, as if summoned. She's tall, taller than Rosa even, with probably a good half foot over Mindfang. She has to duck beneath the doorframe to make it out with her horns intact. "The fact that you keep wrecking them means that you're doing something horribly wrong."

"Screw you, Elenor! I'll sail my ship whichever fucking way I want to!" Mindfang bellows, nearly deafening Rosa.

"Even into the bottom of the ocean? Just because your moirail and kismesis are seadwellers doesn't give you the ability to breathe underwater!" She can shout just as loudly, which Rosa appreciates. "THAT'S NOT A SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED ABILITY."

Mindfang flinches a little at the yelling, her left eye twitching and her arm tightening around Rosa's waist. Her instinctive response is, of course, to move closer to Mindfang's side-- she's not used to seeing Mindfang scared or even startled.

Rosa presses her face into her neck, unwilling to possibly embarrass her with words.

"As you can see, Pet, Elenor is a litttttttle bit of a bitch." Mindfang laughs, awkwardly; her voice shakes towards the end. Elenor, who is uncomfortably beautiful, smiles smugly at them.

"No, I'm just an asshole. I don't like gendered terms for my personality deficiencies. I would be just as awful if I were a man."

Mindfang groans. "I know, Elenor! I know! FUCK YOU."

"Isn't that why you've got this... um... individual."

"Hello. I'm Rosa!" Rosa interjects, cheerfully, forcing herself to smile. It doesn't work very well. She bought me a few months ago!"

"I bet you were expensive and not worth the price whatsoever."

"She got my virginity?" Rosa offers, awkwardly. That. That, um, didn't sound good.
"Hmmm. Vienna, I really think you need a better accountant. Seriously, stop wasting money on shit that's NOT WORTH IT."

"Fun fact about Elenor-- she used to date the Orphaner. Romantically. Which is why we're friends. Because we both hate him. But I still have sex with him."

"I'm going to go... look at the boat." Rosa says, slowly, trying to smile at the other woman who, in addition to being very tall, has very nice hair and is stomping down the stairs with the aid of a very handsome cane that looks as if, in addition to a mobility aid, could very easily smash her head in.

No one corrects her that it's a 'ship' and she takes this as a very bad sign. Lacking sea legs or no, she finds the strength to scurry away.

The Selcis is a beautiful ship. Smaller than the Widow by at least a third, if not a half. Where the Widow was magnificent the Selcis is utterly elegant, a sleeker shape with one less mast to be knocked down. Rosa doesn't love her at first sight but-- well-- she gives admiration where it's due. The figurehead’s brutal, fanged smile is irresistible-- leave it to Mindfang to have a mythologically correct Siren as her figurehead. Look at those teeth! And the scales are nothing if not a work of art, painted in a gorgeous shade of lapis lazuli that's almost too bright against the perfectly polished mahogany of her hull. But none of that is at all remarkable when compared to the carvings!

The railings, from the mast to the doorframes. are covered in intricate carvings reminiscent of sketches she's seen covering Mindfang's journals. Rosa walks along the deck and marvels at the designs that run beneath her fingertips. She can see where damage has been very carefully patched with wood of different colors, the junctures carved over to hide the color change. There are abstract creatures whose faces loom out of the ends of rails, elaborate knots whose wooden ropes have been twined around one another in grooves that can be traced with the fingertips like miniature labyrinths. The entire thing is a masterpiece of antique artistry-- Rosa feels like she's aboard a ship that spent several centuries at the bottom of the ocean only to have her grave defiled by nosy seadwelling archeologists and was subsequently forced into an overpriced museum exhibit... before Mindfang stole her.

She's beautiful, every one of her planks. And very clearly all Mindfang's. The Selcis might be beautiful, but Rosa can see where the poor girl has been bludgeoned past the point that she should have ever made it back to shore. Leaning down over the rail, she can see that huge sections of the hull have been replaced, or hammered over with copper that's already gone green in the water.

"What do you think of her?" Mindfang asks, eager for approval. She all but skips across the deck, hair flying out behind her in the ocean breeze. Elenor shuffles behind her, leaning heavily on her cane. She hasn't stopped glaring at Rosa since she climbed aboard and isn't changing that fact now. Rosa feels the sudden urge to apologize, but refuses to as she has done absolutely nothing wrong.

Rosa grins, shyly, at Mindfang and shrugs. "Not as grand as the Widow. Much less gold leaf. But the craftsmanship seems impeccable."

She spares a nod to Elenor who, while still seeming less than pleased at Rosa's presence, gives Rosa a snort of acknowledgement.

"She's been dry docked for almost two years now, my poor darling. We got hit hard a while back and I couldn't bring myself to let her go down." Mindfang caresses the railing before bending down to kiss it. Rosa winces a little. Oh dear. That's not good for her self-esteem. "But she's all better now, my beautiful girl!"

"...Uh-huh." Rosa tries not to sound jealous. Because she isn't. Not at all. It would be insane to
experience jealousy over a ship. It's one thing to be jealous of another woman-- that's fine, she supposes. But a ship? No. That's ridiculous. After all, Mindfang can't make love to a ship so Rosa's already the permanent winner.

Wait. She can't, can she? Rosa eyes her warily. No. She won't sexually experiment with an inanimate object when she has a perfectly viable woman to have sex with her.

"You want to see how she sails?" Mindfang asks, her voice pitching up into an excited trill. Rosa wants to kiss her for that, wood polish be damned. She settles for nuzzling into her side and letting Mindfang hoist her off the deck of the ship.

"I know as well as you do that if we get anywhere near the edge of this harbor you won't ever turn around." Rosa teases, yelping when Mindfang dips her back over the railing's edge and she spends a few heart-thundering seconds thinking she's going to drown. But Mindfang doesn't drop her into the harbor.

"We could sail off into the sunset, never to be seen again," Mindfang breathes, as if she's proposing they strip each other naked and make love against the ship's wheel. Rosa would be lying if she said it wasn't a desirable idea.

"Yes, but if it's just you and I that means I'm your first mate and according to what I've read of a certain infamous pirate's personal writings, that would entitle me to a share of whatever we plunder."

"Mmmm I'll know exactly what I'd be plundering," Mindfang purrs, wrapping her arms around Annora's waist and pressing their hips together. "Let's find us a nice little island, drop anchor and see how long it takes for us to get bored of fucking each other senseless."

"Don't you have a fleet of pirates to be commanding?" Rosa chides, pretending that she's not mortified someone else is overhearing any of this. Mindfang shrugs. "I'm only attracted to women with power, you know."

"Mmm you'd better be, Pet." Mindfang kisses her collarbone-- with an impressive show of teeth-- and then slaps her, hard, on the ass. "Anything else, Elenor, my love?"

"Really, Vienna?" Rosa snaps, trying to stomp on her foot. It doesn't work so well as she is wearing steel-tipped boots and her (admittedly elegant) toes remain un-mangled.

"I mean, thank you, Elenor, my platonic friend whom I have never not even once, had sex with, not because I didn't try but because she thinks I'm an idiot and informed me I was from inferior genetic stock."

"...Well. Now I want to murder her for completely different reasons." Rosa narrows her eyes. What bothers her more about this? The fact that Mindfang was rebuffed or the fact that Mindfang attempted to have sex with another woman? For the sake of their relationship status she's going to pretend that she's upset that Mindfang was refused.

"Oh, calm down Pet. She's two shades away from violet." Mindfang rolls her eyes and squeezes Rosa's hand tightly in an attempt to keep her from ripping Elenor's eyes out. Elenor herself looks absolutely non-plussed at the idea that she's ten seconds from being mauled.

"I'm the rarest of anyone here and even I don't think you're from inferior stock." Rosa mutters, resting her head against into Mindfang's neck. Oh heavens she's being nauseatingly affectionate right now, isn't she? Elenor looks like she's going to punch someone.

Is there a tactful way of saying 'too late, she's mine now, bitch'? Rosa doesn't think so. But she'd love
to anyways. She settles for twining herself amorously around Mindfang, kissing her neck until she trills embarrassedly. Mindfang’s face glows as blue as the sky when she realizes what exactly she’s done-- Rosa is immediately gratified by this.

"You're such a romantic, Annora." Mindfang rolls her eyes but does, at long last, kiss her. Hard. *Romantically* hard, with lots of tongue and some sneaky groping. Which is *nice*. "I'll bribe you with wine if you'll be nice to me, hmm?"

"I only accept bribes of wine when they're accompanied by cheese." Rosa mutters, darkly. Mindfang rolls her eyes.

"This is the thanks I get for taking such good care of you? Really, Rosa? Really?" Mindfang shakes her head, slowly. "I'm going to have to remind you to be grateful for what you have."

For once that doesn't seem like a good thing. Perhaps it could be? Perhaps this is another one of those 'the threat is actually great sex! Ha-HAH!' moments and she's just misinterpreting Mindfang's tone?

Yes. That's probably it. Rosa shifts her eyes to the sea, unwilling to meet her Mistress's gaze. Lying to herself was far easier when she spent every day of her life living in brutal discomfort; it's one thing to consistently deny the existence of reality when reality is sitting in a slave market with your son's dying screams deafening you every time you resurface. It's another thing entirely when you were just beginning to ever-so-cautiously believe life might be worth the fuss after all.

When Mindfang drops her arm around her shoulders and curls her fingers into Rosa's coat, therefore, she finds it very difficult to pretend that it isn't a gesture of paranoid ownership. But she does so anyways, unwilling to make herself look too closely at what's amiss.

"We're going, Elenor. Have her ready to go by the end of the week."

"Maybe. I'll think about it. I'm not sure you deserve her back."

"...Please don't leave me here."

"What? Why would I--? No, Rosa, damnit. Not you, the ship. Why would I leave you here? Elenor would make you work."

"I can work!" Rosa grumbles, "You *can*, but I won't let you. You've got one job, Rosa. One. Job." Mindfang makes a faux-menacing face that Rosa recognizes as 'playful' instead of 'mean'. "You're supposed to keep me company."

Rosa makes an unconvinced noise, a cross between a grunt and a derisive snort. Company? That... implies willing consent. And while she is finding herself increasingly content with this situation, she's still not wholly convinced it's in her best emotional interests to get invested.

"You're very good at it, too." Mindfang adds, as if this is a lovely compliment and will somehow mitigate Rosa's skepticism.

"I think I would prefer being a terrible laborer over being a glorified whore."

"Oh, is that what you're calling it now?" Elenor mutters, tapping her cane against one of the planks and making an angry noise when it wiggles.
"Shut up Elenor," Rosa snaps. She and Mindfang both look wonderfully startled.

"First of all, I'm pretty sure if you were an actual whore, we'd have fucked a lot sooner. Second, I prefer to think of you as an involuntary travelling companion with benefits."

"That does sound nicer," Rosa agrees, rubbing at her eyes and regretting not keeping her mouth shut. "But you still ostensibly purchased me to have sex with."

"Well, I think the fact that I waited for months to sleep with you might speak to the fact that I had more in mind than sex when I purchased you."

"I'm not faulting you for it. I'm just saying, it's unfair to both of us to pretend that I'm... some girl you picked up on a blind date instead of a slave."

"True. But... I don't want one of those. I want you. I can get anyone to have sex with me, I can't get anyone else to be you."

Rosa inhales slowly, ineffectively quelling the urge to end this conversation by jumping overboard. It probably wouldn't help anything. She wants to stop talking about an uncomfortable subject-- making an apparent suicide attempt will not make this any less awkward.

"Vienna, there's no need to lie to her; she clearly knows her place."

"Didn't someone tell you to shut up!?" Mindfang shouts. Elenor falls quiet. "You're replaceable, Elenor."

Rosa is immediately yanked, hard, towards the gangplank. "We're setting sail in three days, have her ready to go by then."

Surprisingly, Rosa is not upset to be leaving. She trips down the gangplank after Mindfang. It's extremely appeasing to know that Mindfang feels her shipbuilder is, in fact, more replaceable than her slave. That's... that's nice. But it also doesn't make Rosa feel any less subjugated. Mindfang keeps dragging her along until there's solid land beneath their feet instead of salt-weathered dock.

It is, most definitely, a quainter part of the city than where they've been staying. The buildings are less lavish and, more often than not, painted in jarringly bright colors, cascades of flowers spinning from window boxes and vines sinking their leaves into the flesh of the stone as they make their way up and around front doors. Rosa likes it. It seems more like the sort of place that she, perhaps, might like to live in. Not that anyone cares about that.

"The major port is in the next cove right there," Mindfang explains, answering a question Rosa did not, nor would ever have had. She nods pensively all the same. "Most of the fishermen dock here. Some private crafts as well."

She points across the bay to where a decidedly sinister ship is lurking, almost entirely concealed by an outcropping of rock. "Popular place for imperial vessels, too. Easier to hide your presence when no one knows you've arrived."

The cobblestones are rough beneath their feet as they wend their way up road from the docks. Mindfang stumbles a few times, ill at ease now that she's parted from her ship. Rosa relents and takes her arm. Mindfang immediately clings to her, clearly grateful for the additional support, although neither of them deigning to mention it. "And where do the pirates stay?"

Mindfang sniffs contumeliously and rolls her eyes. The effect of her melodramatic offense is utterly mitigated by the fact that she's grinning almost from ear to ear-- an expression that, while terrifying in
the hint of madness expressed, is wholly beguiling. "How in the world would I be expected to know that, Rosa. I'm shocked. Deeply horrified, really, that you'd cast such aspersions onto my character."

"Mmm. Yes. You should file a police report. Wanted pirate offended by wanted war criminal’s accusation that she is pirate." Rosa teases, absently adjusting Mindfang’s scarf. She could really use a new one.

"I always forget you're a war criminal. You don't seem like you have it in you." Mindfang laughs a little, sounding like a little, twittering bird. She rubs her neck and gives Rosa an uncertain smile. When it isn't immediately returned, she presses her rings against her mouth and adjusts them with her teeth so she won't have to let Rosa go.

"I don't think I do. I think it was rather effectively taken from me."

"Well. You should try to get it back. I'd like to see it."

"Thank you."

"I do... I do think of you as a person, you know. You're very special to me."

Rosa doesn't huff. She doesn't glare. She doesn't frown. She sighs, quietly-- thankfully managing to disguise it as taking a deep breath of sea air. She sounds so earnest but... damn is it hard to believe her. It's tempting to ignore the mistrust she feels and just... take her at face value. So tempting to accept her words as pure as polished silver and... oh, she doesn't even know.

"Fine. I won't make you believe me. Keep living in your delusional world." Mindfang sighs. Rosa snorts and rolls her eyes. "I should leave you on the ship. I'll bet you'd like me more when you've been left alone for a week."

She speaks casually, almost like she's giving directions to a tourist. It's an exchange she'll forget five minutes from now-- assured that she's been correct and that no problems will arise from her statements.

Rosa bites her lip. Yes, that would be why she's not in love with the woman. "My apologies, Mistress."

They walk in one-sided silence for a quarter of an hour-- Mindfang chattering non-stop about the Selcis. Rosa follows her, making non-committal sounds and nodding when required. It's rather difficult to think of anything to say when she can't stop thinking about how uncomfortable it feels to be pissed off at the woman who owns her. She might hold her own papers but that doesn't make the problem go away. Mindfang probably has a half-dozen copies of them hidden somewhere in the first place-- not to mention the fact that the market she was bought from would keep a copy. She's not free just because she's been handed a sheet of paper. That's not how that works. Mindfang still acts like she's in charge and threatens like she owns her.

You don't threaten to lock up your lover. You threaten to lock up your dog-- and even that appears to be increasingly more frowned upon in mainstream society. Rosa should shove her away, of course. Shove her away, growl, whine a bit-- or maybe just punch her in the face. But she... likes being close to her. Her coat is warm and soft and-- impossibly-- it's difficult to take it personally. Pragmatically, she's absolutely furious. Realistically? She's ashamed of herself for being so utterly happy with everything.

"You're angry now, aren't you?" Mindfang mutters, kissing her forehead, probably leaving behind a smudge of iridescent, cadmium red lipstick. Rosa wishes she'd go back to the blue-- she finds the red
attractive, of course, but there's something utterly enthralling about her blue lipstick. "Don't fret. I'm not that angry."

That's not the issue at hand. But Rosa forces her face to look relieved all the same. It's not worth the conflict.

Mindfang proceeds to lead them up a flight of stairs Rosa would never have noticed without a guide. Their stones are cracked by a green rainbow of moss and weeds, but swathes of vibrant purple clematis have tumbled over the wall. Rosa picks one and sniffs it, absently. It's subtly sweet in a way that reminds her of being a little girl again, sitting in the window and foretasting the future-- knowing that it would never be as beautiful as she'd like but still hoping.

Rosa twirls the stem between her index finger and thumb. She hasn't seen clematis in years and her instinct, of course, is to keep it. But that's a painfully frivolous thought; she has no vase and, of course, there isn't a way to tell how many errands Mindfang will be running. She should really throw it somewhere. The thought of it being errantly trampled, however, makes her heart fold in half. There has to be someplace nice to leave it.

She's managed to fall behind, yet Mindfang-- true to form-- has been talking consistently while she climbs, without waiting for response. She doesn't notice Rosa's two dozen stairs back until she reaches a landing, asks a question and, upon receiving no response, turns to repeat it. Upon realizing that her secondary shadow is, in fact, not present, she frowns.

"Rosa? What the hell are you doing?" Mindfang shouts, louder than she needs two. Its twenty four stairs, not an ocean.

She starts up the stairs towards her, the flower still delicately clasped in her hand. Why don't these stairs have a railing on both sides? There's a railing against the tall wall that borders the left edge of the staircase, but not one of the side that overlooks a massive cliff. They could use a railing on that side. If someone trips, there's going to be a rather major lawsuit against the municipality. Or not. She could be making false assumptions based off her political beliefs.

"What's that, Pet?"

"A flower. From the wall." Rosa murmurs, softly. Oh dear, was that too aggressive? She didn't mean for that to be aggressive. Fuck. Fuck everything--

"Oh. Oh yes, of course. I didn't even notice those! You know, I've come up this stairwell about a hundred times and I have never known what kind of flowers they are. I always mean to look it up but..." She makes a bizarre face-- nose wrinkled, one eye half shut-- and shrugs.

"It's a Clematis flower. One of the more fragrant varieties, native to warm, humid regions. It's rare to see them wild like this-- I've only ever heard of them being carefully trellised in formal gardens."

"Mmm, makes sense. There used to be a rather beautiful estate there-- this absolute gem of a house, two hundred years old. Built from this fantastic gold-veined marble. Mostly courtyards with huge fountains and neurotically tended gardens."

"She takes the flower from Rosa, their fingers rubbing together like suede on velvet. After sniffing it, cautiously, she tucks into Rosa's hair. It's an unexpectedly winsome gesture from her, considering that she's been utterly impossible all morning. More to the point, however, Mindfang isn't quite the type to indulge in simple gestures-- she's much more of a 'grand overture when everything goes horribly wrong' sort of woman. She intentionally allows her fingertips to linger behind Rosa's ear, gently stroking her hairline. Rosa shivers. Mindfang grins duplicitously. "They used to throw the
most magnificent parties. Whole mansion full of people, food so good you dreamt of it for weeks--not to mention the cake."

Of course she remembers the cake. Of course she does. Rosa laughs.

"I once spent an entire evening just sitting in one of the gorgeous courtyards absolutely surrounded by flowers. Literally just sat on a bench next to a reflecting pool with the most gorgeous mosaic dragon at the bottom. I'm not normally a big fan of dragons but it was nice, I guess." She laughs at herself. "Just sat there all night but wasn't alone for even a second. People just kept wandering in and out of everywhere. Eventually ended up with a recently docked naval crew which was, all in all, one of the most drunken evenings of my life."

"You pretended to get drunk and stole the keys to their ship, didn't you?" Rosa leans against the wall and raises an eyebrow. Mindfang returns the expression.

"Well, yeah, of course. I totally sank it, of course, since it was not a ship intended to be manned by a single individual but, hey, I know how to swim. This area has some rather lovely aquatic life, very much worth the effort."

Rosa forgot how much she loves Mindfang's stories. Mostly because after hearing so many banal tales of piracy Rosa started to tune her out. She loves listening to tales of lost-and-found treasures--but the stories of slash and burn? Not quite to her taste.

"Anyways, it was the most breathtaking place I've ever seen. I mean, I love my house but... it was nothing compared to this place. Stayed there a few times when I was studying here at the art academy-- my predecessor was close to the man who owned it."

Mindfang stares up at the wall and half-smiles, reaching up to rub her fingertips across the vines that cover the bricks. "They were always hosting artists and musicians... every wall was covered in these exquisite mosaics, you could hear music everywhere."

She sighs and smiles at Rosa over her shoulder. "I forgot it was here," she says, softly, her entire face softening with the statement. The angular cuts of her jaw and cheekbones seem younger, her eyes slump shut a little and, using up her emotional quota for the month, she looks vulnerable.

"What happened to it?" Rosa murmurs, running a hand down Mindfang's arm. Mindfang shifts towards her slightly, letting Rosa get a better grasp.

"Hmm? Oh, right right right. About twenty five years back there was a massive fire, whole place burned down, the guy's moirail died in the blaze, whole thing was just heartbreaking. He left the area, never rebuilt the house."

"Oh. That's... that's incredibly sad." Rosa frowns. That sounds horrific, actually. Really horrific. She can't even imagine how painful that would be. Your moirail dying when your house burns down? Oh no. She's sad now.

Mindfang throws an arm around her shoulder and squeezes, tightly. "Anyways I guess the gardens kept going after it was abandoned and that's how we ended up with this staircase covered in flowers."

Rosa smiles and leans into her heavily. Mindfang makes a dissatisfied noise but nuzzles her neck all the same. "That sounds lovely."

"Yeah. It was." Mindfang takes her hand and squeezes it, softly. "Come on. Let's go get lunch, huh? I'll tell you more about it."
Rosa nods. Mindfang grins and tugs her up the stairs. Rosa stumbles after her, happy once again to be dragged along by the current she generates.

* * *

There is a surprising moratorium on ship talk over lunch. Mindfang drags her past the gate to the burnt-out mansion and tells her all about what the front walk used to look like before everything burned down. Apparently the trees were smaller.

Rosa spends several minutes filling in shocking gaps in Mindfang's knowledge by informing her of the common and proper names of every type of plant she points out. She's familiar with the more common ones-- she knows what a poppy is and what cypress trees look like but isn't quite able to identify a eucalyptus tree ("stupid herb") nor can she identify windflowers ("fake version of a stupid herb").

After Rosa proves herself quick to identify nineteen out of twenty plants Mindfang dares her to identify, she's forced to concede the fact that Rosa does, in fact, know more about something than she herself does. She does so with surprising elegance, in fact, informing Rosa that she's now going to be consulting on such things during foreign voyages.

She's also curious to know why Rosa knows so much about flowers in the first place which leads to a long-winded discussion of the empire's laws regarding controlled substances-- and then a discussion on how much money one can make selling poison on the black market. This amuses Mindfang to no end, of course, and she's quickly contracted to do that as well.

They eat in a small yet incredibly expensive restaurant; Mindfang's back alleys have inexplicably led them into an incredibly affluent area of the city. Which Rosa supposes is to be expected, since Mindfang steals expensive things so, most likely, must sell them in expensive places as well. It's another strike against her ability to be angry with her. Rosa likes good food and is developing a growing fondness for good wine. Not having to pay for either nor having to work to pay for either is a definite bonus. Or. Well. Technically she's working. But her job description seems to mostly consist of putting up with the attentions of an attractive woman, playing countless rounds of poker with Marcus and generally experiencing the best the planet has to offer.

Mind you, she is still blatantly enslaved. As in a 'wears a collar' enslaved. And while she's not exactly being subjugated to anything particularly egregious... it's still bondage. Not. Not the fun type. The, um, variety that violates personal liberties.

Post-lunch, Mindfang proceeds to drag her on a litany of errands, most of which are-- actually-- rather interesting. There's the wine store where she orders an ungodly amount of alcohol to stock the ship with, a stationary shop where she signs for a dozen blank journals to be sent to the ship and, bizarrely, a large quantity of soap. Enough soap for sixteen people to wash daily for a year. Rosa asks for clarification on this one and Mindfang just snorts-- nothing too useful. "If I buy this much soap... no one has an excuse to smell awful."

That is, Rosa thinks, very valid thinking. She approves. She also makes Mindfang buy an obscene quantity of laundry soap and window cleaning solution as those are Rosa's more immediate concerns. Mindfang complies without objection. There's a few others stop-offs for various luxury goods Mindfang obliquely stocks her ship with, including several new goose down comforters and pillows and a few sets of silk sheets because... every fearsome pirate needs a bed fit for a princess?

She'd bitch about that but, well, she's sharing that bed... so... She just convinces Mindfang that they need throw pillows as well as another set of towels because one towel between two women is not
always the best arrangement.

Mindfang accepts all this as perfectly intelligent and agrees wholeheartedly. There is a lot of money spent on linens. A rather remarkable amount, but it's rather unladylike to mention finances. It's also unladylike to make so much noise during sex that the people staying in the hotel room next door comment on it but... no one but Mindfang saw her do that and isn't it kind of part of her job description?

Regardless, it's impossibly enjoyable being able to appoint her living quarters without needing to worry about price. All that she really needs at this point is more yarn and some lovely books to read. Possibly some more tea? No; Mindfang bought tea at the wine shop. Why a combined wine and tea shop exists Rosa can't explain. Perhaps it's a rich lady thing? That's probably it.

"My feet hurt." Rosa mutters, shifting from ankle to ankle. Mindfang makes a noise of agreement and adjusts the drape of her scarf. Rosa makes a face and readjusts it, not fully satisfied with the way Mindfang left it.

"I'd have brought Marcus but it seemed rude to leave you alone in bed. He also hates towels and has terrible taste. He always wants paisley, Rosa. It's not a good look on a pirate ship."

Oh dear. That's rather sweet. The leaving her alone part, not the paisley part. She hates paisley. Why is it so difficult to remain angry at this woman? Rosa kisses her cheek. "I don't mind. It's nice to see more of the city."

"We're almost done, Pet. I just need to pick up more of my perfume. And... my shoes. I left some shoes here to get repaired last time I was in town." Mindfang sighs and throws her hair over her shoulder. "I got drunk the night before we left and Marcus set sail before I could pick them up."

The walk to the perfumer's shop is blessedly short. Mindfang holds her hand the entire way, the cold metal of her rings digging into Rosa's much warmer palm. There are bells mounted on the door that jingle, loudly, when Mindfang pushes it open. A wave of smells hits Rosa's nose like a candle in the darkness: not overwhelming but impossible to miss.

"Go look around," Mindfang mutters shooing Rosa to the other side of the room. Rosa eagerly complies. The shop is fairly well-sized with gauzy curtains hanging in the windows, blocking direct light from shining on the countless bottles delicately placed on shelves all around the room. Rosa peers closely at the closest rack and grins like a sunflower upon realizing that each bottle has been carefully etched with the proper name and a small sketch of the flower essence bottled within. A few minutes of exploration reveal that almost every aroma possible to produce has been somehow bottled. The shelves against the walls are stacked with unmixed bottles of scent while waist-high racks are covered in pre-mixed scents. Mindfang, obviously, is making use of neither.

Rosa glances over her shoulder to raise her eyebrows at the heated discussion going on between Mindfang and the young man who owns the shop. She is, apparently, dissatisfied with a minor change he's made to the formula of her perfume. There's a lot of swearing on Mindfang's end and, thankfully, much goodhearted laughter on the other.

"It's a pink jasmine instead of a night-blooming one. It's much nicer for the warmer months."

"He's right," Rosa murmurs, while taking a deep breath from a bottle of freesia. Nope. Nope she does not like freesias. She sets it down hurriedly.

"Rosa," Mindfang warns in a single word. Rosa glares into a bottle of lemon verbena. Mmm she likes this.
Rosa puts that bottle back as well and turns, shuffling over to join Mindfang and-- more importantly-- the man who now looks like he's about to cry he's laughing so hard. He reminds her of Marcus, mostly in that he isn't taking Mindfang at all seriously. "You said I was going to consult on flowers."

"I said poison, not flowers." She hisses, carefully slamming a fist onto the display counter. An perfume labelled 'V. Serket' and etched with Mindfang's coat of arms is sitting, unstoppered, just before a row of unlabeled bottles.

"You said both. Don't lie to me." Rosa mutters, taking a page from Mindfang's litany and sighing dramatically. Mindfang snarls at her and Rosa bares her teeth in response.

"So help me I will leave you here with this insufferable man, Rosa." Mindfang threatens, hollowly-- as Rosa would probably love to be left here and Mindfang's not the type to abandon her without fiscal compensation.

"If she does flowers and poisons I would be happy to offer her a job. We make good money off our poisons. As you well know."

"Shut up you can't have her. I spent a lot of money on her." Yep, she was right. Not going to abandon her. If anything, she's going to sell her. Oh. Oh dear. Rosa immediately wraps an arm around Mindfang's.

"Consultant fee?"

"No-- Concubine." Rosa says with a smile. Mindfang kicks her, hard, in the ankle.

"Oh, goodness, no." Rosa's not used to pity over her position and her hackles are immediately raised. Until he finishes his sentence. "I'm so sorry. I don't like women in that way."

Rosa pats him on the forearm, which is the only accessible part of his body. "That's fine, dear. I'm her concubine. I'd happily consult for you free of sexual activity."

Mindfang yanks her hair to get her attention. Rosa yelps and immediately drops her head back to alleviate the pain. Ow. Since when does she do that? "If you don't stop this immediately I'm going to drag you back to the hotel, tie you to our damn bed and show you the main drawbacks for working for this man."

Rosa smiles, despite herself. "Is that a promise?"

Mindfang doesn't bother to respond. She grabs her, yanks her close and kisses her half-senseless. It's actually rather shocking how quickly Mindfang's got her tongue down her throat. Rosa squeaks. Mindfang is still glaring when she pulls away. "Yes. Stop flirting with a gay man to piss me off."

"I'm not--"

"Can we get back on track for a second, here?" The hapless man coughs, delicately. "Because if you're not going to want this perfume I'm going to need time to re-mix it..."

Mindfang rubs her fingers against the back of Rosa's neck. Rosa shivers and unwillingly relaxes. "We'll let Rosa decide."

"She does seem a bit more rational than your usual crowd."

Rosa does not deign to acknowledge that one. She takes a deep breath and keeps smiling. The perfumist hands the bottle to Mindfang. Mindfang unstoppers it, and, in a gesture flawless from habit,
rubs it against her neck, keeping narrowed eyes on Rosa.

She places the stopper back into the bottle. After waiting five seconds for Rosa to react she glares (again). "Damnit, Rosa, give the man your opinion of his perfume."

Rosa hesitantly presses her face to Mindfang's neck and breathes in, deeply. Oh. Oh dear. Rosa just barely manages not to moan. The perfumer is right. Whatever he's done is, somehow, a major improvement on the usual blend-- which was wonderful to begin with.

"I like the perfume." Rosa mumbles, blushing an intense shade of pine green. Mindfang's ears twitch immediately and she smirks. Immediately the perfume bottle is placed onto the counter as she turns to face Rosa fully.

"What's this, darling?" She asks, with an intimate inflection to her voice that should not be used outside of a bed. Rosa refuses to meet her eyes, dusting her fingers over the stoppers of the displayed bottles. The glass is cool beneath her fingertips and she lingers on a bottle of pale pink perfume to trace it's angular cut.

She knows exactly what Rosa means. Mindfang's an exceedingly clever woman.

"Rosa. What do you think of my perfume?" Mindfang chides, curling her fingers beneath Rosa's chin and stroking her throat. Rosa trills, desperately flustered by the whole situation. "Rosa, Pet. Answer me when I ask you a question."

She slips her hand around the back of Rosa's neck, the leather of her gloves sticking ever-so-slightly to her neck. It's a bizarre sensation but not wholly unpleasant. It's very similar to attempting to pull crushed flower petals off the pavement they've been driven onto in the rain.

"Now, if you please."

Rosa smirks, her upper lip completely curling over one of her fangs. Mindfang grins appreciatively and reaches up with her free hand. She rocks up, "Your perfume makes me want to eat you alive."

"In a mean way or a sexy way?" Mindfang queries, sharply. Rosa raises her eyebrows as if to say 'what the hell do you think'. It's not enough, of course, as Mindfang just keeps glaring.

"In a distinctly sexual fashion, yes," Rosa admits, quietly. Mindfang is close enough that she can simply slump against her. She nuzzles Mindfang's throat and makes a euphoric noise. Mindfang gently wraps her fingers around Rosa's horn and tugs. Rosa tilts her head back as requested and, before Mindfang can do so, kisses her.

It turns out that the perfume smells even nicer when they're this close. Mindfang squeezes her waist and leans her against the countertop behind them. Rosa throws her arms around her neck, not clinging to Mindfang but just to get them out of the way.

Mindfang pulls away eventually, laughing. "She approves! I'll take it."

Rosa nods, then rests her chin on Mindfang's shoulder, resting her hands on her back. It takes some adjusting to get into a comfortable position since there's a button on her shoulder, but she manages.

She's just finding her emotional stride once more when she spots someone else entering the store. Rosa glances up at the newcomer less out of curiosity and more out of response to the stimulus. She takes in the woman's appearance-- her remarkable horns-- and silently compliments her shoes before going back to snuggling Mindfang's neck.
Something compels her to look up. Rosa pulls away from Mindfang to stare up at the other woman once more. She's still standing in the doorway, giving Rosa a bewildered stare. Rosa stares back, equally as bemused. Do they know each other? They must know each other.

Hmm. Rosa tilts her head and squints, her mind an absolute blank. They’ve been holding eye contact for almost a minute now and it's getting highly uncomfortable. The other woman draws a conclusion before Rosa does and, apparently, it isn't a good one, because she immediately glares.

Rosa inhales too sharply. Oh fuck. She does know her. There's not much more she has to say on that subject. Mostly due to the fact that the moment she matches a face to a name, memory and time period, she ceases being able to breathe. And then ceases to be able to stand, really, and just sort of... swoons.

It's not pleasant in the slightest. Nor is waking up to the taste of salt and the smell of something ungodly awful. She coughs a few times and gags. There's a faint series of noises that could be assembled into the sentence "I'll go get her some water" if she really tried hard.

Her vision is still fuzzy but, when she tries very hard, she's able to make out Mindfang's face looming over her. "Wha--?" She starts to ask.

"Oh thank fuck, what the hell, Rosa?! What the hell!" Mindfang growls. Is that anger or fear? Ugh she can't tell. She’s going to assume 'fear' because that's the nicer option.

"Yeah, she's coming around-- No, Rosa, don't close your eyes-- I think she's fine? Rosa? Hey, no, no if you do that I will slap you and that will not be pleasant for us."

Mindfang hauls her up into a sitting position. Rosa's head immediately lolls back and Mindfang hurriedly drops her. She hits her head. Mindfang swears profusely.

"Should I call a doctor?"

_She knows that voice._ Rosa immediately becomes alert with terror. She sits up-- too quickly-- and grabs onto Mindfang.

"Rosa I can't breathe--" Mindfang wheezes, prying Rosa's fingers from her coat collar. Rosa immediately grabs onto her shoulders instead, hiding her face in her neck. "--Yeah, no, thanks Judge we do not need a doctor she seems to be pretty hale."

"I don't mind taking her to a hospital for you--"

She whines. Mindfang shushes her. "No, no, I think I'll just take her home-- we were out in the sun for a while, we've been walking a lot-- we had a rough night."

The helpful perfume man reappears; Rosa only knows this because Mindfang is immediately smacking her in the face with a glass of water.

"Is it an allergy? Does she have any allergies? I'm so sorry, I had no idea she had allergies-- most of my perfumes are rather carefully formulated to prevent reactions like this--"

"The woman loves your perfumes. And she doesn't have any allergies-- I think-- fuck-- Rosa are you dying?"

"I want to go home now please." Rosa whispers as loudly as she dares, attempting to hide herself underneath Mindfang's hair. She certainly has enough.
"I'll call you a car-- I'm so sorry, Vienna--"

"Oh for the love of god, Merrik, it's not your fault. She's probably dehydrated." Mindfang stands, slowly, hampered by the fact that Rosa won't let go. Eventually she gets into a crouch and manages to pick her up. "Just. Box up the perfume and send it over to my usual hotel, okay?"

"The Delphinium, over in the historic district?"

"Yes, Merrik. Thank you so much for respecting my confidentiality after nearly killing the woman I'm in love with."

Rosa fails to take notice of this exchange as attempting to hide in Mindfang's hair isn't working very well and she can see the other woman standing, sneering at her.

She's going to die. Realizing this as fact, Rosa presses her face into Mindfang's neck and does her best not to cry. The car comes within a few minutes and, after growling at more of the perfumist's apologies, they get inside. Rosa refuses to let go of Mindfang or say a word the entire drive home, instead preferring to keep hiding.

Mindfang has little to say to any of this. She tries to say quite a bit, but Rosa doesn't deign to respond. Rosa only responds to the question (statement) "I'M TAKING YOU TO A HOSPITAL" to say it isn't needed.

She carries Rosa into the hotel. Marcus is on the porch waiting for their return and is verbally horrified to see her.

"VIENNA!" He shouts. Mindfang immediately starts swearing at him.

"She fainted, she's fine, she just won't let go of me or say a single word and I have no fucking idea what she's doing."

"I'm going to die." Rosa says, hoarsely.

"What? No you're not, you fainted. You're probably dehydrated. Just go drink some water and take a nap."

"She's going to kill me." Rosa hisses, urgently, reaching out to grab Marcus's shirt collar.

Marcus stiffens, immediately taking Rosa's hand and squeezing it comfortingly. "Did you threaten to kill her?"

"NO. WHAT THE HELL, ANNORA? WHAT THE HELL." Mindfang practically throws her at Marcus. Marcus catches her, thankfully. She doesn't let go of Mindfang, however, and they're caught in a very awkward position.

Marcus eventually coaxes Rosa to let go. She does so unwillingly.

"Okay, Vienna... you know what? Go have a drink. Finish your errands. I'll... I'll take her upstairs, get her something to eat and pour her some water. She'll be fine in an hour." Marcus is much better at sheltering her and making her feel safe than Mindfang is, but Rosa's still reasonably sure Mindfang could prevent her murder better than him.

It takes him several minutes to convince Mindfang that it's safe to leave Rosa alone and even more time to convince her that Rosa might be better off resting unmolested. She kisses Rosa's forehead before departing, whispering something that could either have been a threat or an epithet of affection.
Marcus hauls her inside the moment Mindfang is out of sight. One of the smaller, private sitting rooms is available and he kicks the door shut behind them. Once in private he drops her onto the couch. The hotel's omnipresent wait staff is quick to knock and see what the problem is—arrangements for food and water are quickly made.

Being a rather competent moirail, Marcus all but forces her to drink most of a pitcher of water and won't cease haranguing her until she eats half of an apple. Satisfied that she's not dehydrated or starving, he sinks onto his knees beside the couch she's lying on.

"Did she try to kill you?" He asks, softly, tucking her hair behind her ear.

She shakes her head.

"Did she threaten to?" Same tone of voice.

Rosa mimes 'no' once more.

"Are you sick?"

Another nope.

"Then tell me what's happening."

"I... I saw the woman who... I saw the woman who..." Rosa can't figure out the sentence. She hasn't fully managed to think it properly; she sure as hell doesn't want to say it out loud. That will make it real.

"You saw the woman who?" Marcus prods.

Rosa pulls her face out of the throw pillow to snarl, menacingly at him. Marcus jolts back. "I saw the woman who sentenced my son to death."

"...Well. Um. That would. That would certainly startle me, too."

And that's when the conversation breaks down.

* * *

Marcus unlocks the door and ushers her inside. He doesn't say a word as he sits her on the couch, just stares at her with fathomlessly worried eyes and shrugs, helplessly.

"I don't know what I can tell you, Annora." He sighs, rubbing at his eyes. His fingernails are rimmed with grit and all Rosa can think about is telling him to wash his hands better. The tattoos that begin just above his wrists and twist up towards his shoulders, like ropes artfully tied to a ship's mast, are bared with the gesture, shirtsleeves a little too short to keep his secrets covered. "I really don't. I mean-- I want to tell you I believe you, but--"

"Why is there a but! She knows who I am!" Rosa yowls, pitifully, covering her face-- and her sheer, unabashed panic-- with one of the throw pillows. "I'm going to die! She's going to kill me!"

"She's not going to kill you, Annora. She probably didn't even recognize you. I think you need to calm down, sweetheart--"

Rosa throws her pillow at him. He ducks and the fabric snags on his horn. When Marcus reaches up to pluck it off, the thin velvet splits open and a hail of feathers spills onto his shoulders. "SHE KNEW MY NAME, MARCUS. MY FULL NAME. AND MY TITLE. DON'T TELL ME TO
"CALM DOWN!"

"Annora, I don't even know your name or your title; she's hardly going to be able to find you based off that information. I think you're letting paranoia get the better of you."

"I think you're letting stupid get the better of you." Rosa snaps. "Do I need to spell it out for you? Do you really not know who I am?"

"As far as everyone knows your sentence was commuted to banishment, under penalty of death if you ever returned to the surface world." Marcus shrugs a little. Oh, lovely. Was there a single person aboard the Widow who didn't know who she was? "There isn't anyone looking for you!"

"You're not listening to me. She wasn't looking for me, she recognized me when I walked into her in the ladies' washroom."

"...Do you honestly think that one of our nation's top prosecutors would frequent the same restaurants as one of our nation's most infamous pirates?"

"No. But she might frequent the same restaurants as our nation's Marquise of the Eighth Ward."

"Look, Annora, you're clearly convinced of whatever it is you think you saw so I don't want to keep trying to help. You're being unreasonable."

Rosa throws a pillow at him. Marcus has good reflexes and ducks, almost hitting the floor with the effort. "You're being unreasonable!"

"Annora, I think you need to lie down for a bit."

"Fine. She hisses, narrowing her eyes. "But if I get arrested, you're paying my bail."

Neither of them feel it's necessary to remark that if she gets arrested, she'll probably be dead before anyone can decide whether or not she's eligible to be sent free.

Marcus gets the spare blanket out of the closet when Rosa refuses to move over to the bed; she's angry at Mindfang and the best way to seek revenge, in her mind, is to refuse to share a bed with her. Even if she's not even in the building. Marcus leaves her with a bid to 'be good' and 'not to do anything stupid'.

"Please, Annora, try to calm down. You're fine. Even if she was who she thought she was--"

"She was!"

"--Do you really think she'll be the woman who finally captures the infamous Pirate Mindfang?"

"She was the woman to catch the Signless." Rosa whispers, her fingers twisting into the couch cushions. "She found me when I wanted to live. What's to stop her now that I don't?"

"Don't say that, Annora. Please don't say that."

"My child is dead, my moirail thinks I'm insane and the woman who intends me as her matesprit is most likely doing so out of a literary delusion give me one reason I should want to remain alive."

He doesn't have any. Not a single rebuttal for any of that. Because who can deny that he's concerned, that Mindfang's delusional and her children are dead? No one. Except, perhaps, a god. If there was one. And she hasn't thought there was for years. No god beyond the grace of her fellow creatures and look at how well that's played out.
Marcus retreats solemnly, well aware of his limitations. They may not have known each other long but he's puzzled out that, at times like this, it's best not to disturb her. The waters of heartbreak run deep. When they're calm, it's almost as if she can see the surface once more, to the place where sunlight glitters. Occasionally she might even resurface to take a few longed-for breaths of air, sweet with salt and decay, but there's only so long that can last. When the storm hits, there's no seeing floor nor sky and she's found it best to simply relax and let herself be tossed along for the ride.

* * *

She lays on the couch staring at the ceiling, trying to focus on anything that will anchor her fears to reality. Is she sane or is Marcus right, has her mind finally decided 'enough is enough!' and dropped all pretense at stability? She often worries about that but, right now, it screams of falsehood. She's as sane as she's ever been. Rosa saw her. They spoke. Two words.

"Apostate," slinking off the other woman's lips like the shnick-shnick of scissor blades, cutting off hair that's been worn long for decades in a last gesture of useless defiance.

"Reverend," her own low growl, that of a dog chained too long, who has forgotten what it was like to roam the streets starving and alone and now can only crave what he's lost, constantly throwing himself to the end of a chain that will never break-- only shorten.

Two words, two simple, insignificant words in a language that contains millions like it, hundreds of 'A' words and 'R' words with eight letters. Rosa will never be able not to remember the two women who named her.

The one who called her "Initiate" the first time, a voice that was never given a name as her youth was sacrificed to give another's age meaning; a Sister who had served her time and is, finally, freed to see the sky. She'd murmured the word as a blessing, "Initiate," fingers curling around Rosa's horn in a gesture of anxious affection. Rosa likes to pretend that the woman she replaced had no idea what would happen to her, moments later, and what the world would take from her in the coming days, weeks, years, sweeps, decades--

But she did. Of course she did. Because she lost the same thing. And no matter how noble you want to call yourself, at the end of the day there isn't a creature alive that won't collapse under the strain of a life too long to be worth living and crawl into the first warm bed.

The second woman to name her kept none of the same delusions of kindness, nor had Rosa expected any. Head ringing from one too many encounters with a slab of hard concrete, mouth full of the taste of blood not her own and ears struggling to claw their way back into her skull with the sound of her loved ones screaming she'd had no thoughts of mercy to entertain. Collapsed on the floor before a steel table in a steel room with a steel lamp and a steel guard, breathing was the most she could accomplish.

"Apostate," she'd said, with the disappointed irreverence of someone who has never been down there, who has never had to listen to the screaming of a sentient beingdevoured by its friends, who has never been forced to lay awake at night struggling to remember the color of the sky--

"Apostate. That doesn't have to be so, you know." She'd said, and neither of them were naive enough to pretend Rosa didn't understand what was happening the moment they led her from her cell.

Both times, Rosa had damned them to hell until her voice was hoarse and her knees gave out. The first time was silently, staring into a darkness broken only by an unnatural glow of something utterly unnatural-- the snap of a match head, the sharp hiss of burning phosphorus and the sudden softness
of smoke, twisting up into the shadows. The second time she'd been silent as well, dragging herself
to her feet by some unknown force and held her down, forcing the breath from the other woman's
lungs until someone noticed and guards came flooding in, pulling her free.

What would she have said, to either of them? This is your fault? You did this? You broke me? She
knows none of that is true. Rosa sits up and plants her feet on the ground. The coolness of the tile
attempts to reign in her reminiscences but fails. She turns to her breathing, trying to capture it.

Wouldn't it be grand to have someone to blame for all of this. Wouldn't it be spectacular. Wouldn't it
be the greatest thing to ever happen if she could march into someone's office, throw a stack of papers
down onto their desk and scream at them **YOU DID THIS TO ME** until they fell to their knees and
begged her forgiveness.

But that's not to be. She can berate herself, if she chooses, but the rest of them were just *pawns*.
Pawns that she would dearly love to see dead, pawns who's homicides she's nursed a brutal passion
for since the moment they met.

She reaches to her neck for the beads of her rosary and, for the thousandth time, it fails to be present.
Instead she finds the hair-thin links of a pendant chain. The heft of the sapphire in her hand fails to
have the same ponderous quality as counting jade beads, but she closes her eyes and strokes it with
her thumb until she's convinced herself she can feel *something*.

Perhaps it's good that the sadness is starting to fade. Perhaps she should be proud of herself that she
can be *angry* again, that she can taste rage without swallowing tears. How long has it been? Marcus
would know. She should ask.

Provided he's still speaking to her. Provided Mindfang will let him. Rosa sighs. No, that's not fair.
Marcus is a better man than she is a woman and will, of course, do right by her.

She rises, slowly, from the couch. The bathroom door is open and, when she slips inside, the room
has been spotlessly cleaned; there's no way to tell that by the end of the morning it looked as if a pair
of angry magpies had attempted to roost in it. Towels have been replaced and folded, shining brass
knobs buffed until fingerprints were wholly removed and the curtains have been ironed. *Ironed*.
Rosa sniffles at the urge to laugh, not quite able to shoo it away without a passing smile.

Bending low over the sink, she splashes cold water onto her tired eyes. It would really be in her
better interests to, on occasion, try to spend a week or two *not* actively contemplating someone's
death-- homicide, suicide, execution, accident.

There's a knock at the door as she's blotting her face dry. It's Marcus, of course; she lets out a sigh of
relief. He's a good man who knows his worth and his friends. If she kills herself, Mindfang will be
*less than pleased*.

"I haven't killed myself, you can calm down," She calls out, laughing awkwardly. He knocks again
and she rolls her eyes, tossing her towel onto the countertop. "Just come in already, dear heart."

The door opens slowly, cautiously-- poor man, she must have really upset him. There doesn't seem to
be a reason to stop now, however, so she growls "I'm not crazy, you know. She threatened to kill
me."

"I thought we already understood each other that it wasn't a *threat*, it was a *promise*.

"...Motherfucker." Rosa swears, without thinking, and then tries to pretend she doesn't feel painfully
guilty that someone was present to overhear it. She lunges for the bathroom door and slams it, hard,
before the voice's owner can make her way over. "I told him this would happen!"

"Very astute. It seems you may have actually learned something since our last encounter... Demetria, was it?"

Ugh. Rosa can't pretend not to know who she is, now, or she's going to look like she's also trying to be a condescending asshole. What was it-- it was something meant to evoke a feeling and was also uncomfortably religious... Oh what was it... not Judge, judge is too short--- Revered is still too short... Oh, what it is--

Reverend. Yes, that's it. She's the Reverend which is an awfully stupid name. It's even worse than Apostate, which is saying something.

"Oh, spare me the polite disinterest. You know my name, Reverend!" Rosa casts her eyes around the room for a potential weapon; there isn't much in here. Why in heaven's name doesn't a pirate hide weapons in better places? "Both of us know my case was the one that made it possible for you to retire early."

Rosa's eyes are caught by the curtains. She yanks on them, hard, and the curtain rod comes tumbling off it's hooks. It nearly clubs her senseless. It slams into her shoulder instead and she hisses at the impact.

"Just out of curiosity, which one of them are you sleeping with? The pirate or the cabin boy--"

"They're both pirates!" Rosa snaps, hiding behind the door. It's just as well; she'd forgotten to lock it and it shelters her when the Prosecutor bursts inside. Is that her name, anyways? Probably not. Rosa was hardly concerned with her name at the time. "And it's none of your business!"

The woman turns on her heel, surprised, just as Rosa brings the curtain rod across her ribcage. This turns out to be an awful decision as she's got a dagger in her hands and immediately lunges. Rosa's familiar with pain, but even the grazing blow of the knifepoint slipping into her stomach makes her swear. There can't even be an inch of it in there-- Rosa's staving her off with the curtain rod.

"Did I break anything?" Rosa asks, politely, struggling to keep her body free of the knife's reach. "I do hope so; there's only so much unnecessary pain I'd like you to be in before I kill you."

"You didn't manage to last time!" She hisses, eyes narrowed. She makes a perfunctory attempt to stab Rosa once more; Rosa kicks her in the shins. "I'm going to cut off your head and bring it home as a war prize you useless excuse for a revolutionary--"

Rosa hits her again. Harder, this time. Something cracks and Rosa hears the breath rush out of her lungs.

"By order of Her Imperious Condescension--" She wheezes, clinging to the counter behind her to remain standing. "--I arrest you under suspicion of treason, conspiracy to commit treason as well at the aiding and abetting of a known nautical fugitive."

Rosa hits her in the face with the curtain rod because what the hell? Seriously? "That's double jeopardy!"

Despite the fact that Rosa has, at the least, broken one of her ribs, the desired effect of 'falling to the floor and dying immediately' is not gained. She coughs and wheezes with an obvious show of pain, but doesn't fall over and certainly isn't distracted.

She rips the curtain rod out of Rosa's hands and throws it. It rolls beneath the bathtub, denying her
the only viable weapon in the room. Then, she punches Rosa in the jaw.

It hurts. A lot. Especially the part where her jaw cracks and her teeth sink into the flesh of her cheek, filling her mouth with blood. She spits it onto the floor, not wholly willing to swallow blood of such an uncomfortably bland temperature. Hot or cold, that's her policy. She likes cold beverages and hot food and very few things should be consumed at room temperature.

The Reverend punches her again and grabs her by the neck of her dress. It digs cruelly into her windpipe and Rosa gasps for air, kicking her shins repeatedly. It doesn't help; the Reverend resolutely drags her across the room towards the sink. What's she going to do, drown her? Rosa's not sure if that's a dignified way to go out. Lots of vomiting of water involved if it's doesn't succeed, which it won't because she is very determined to win this fight.

Determination doesn't help, however, when the Reverend hauls her halfway onto the bathroom counter, grabs her by the hair and snaps her neck forward.

She hits harder than Rosa remembered. Her eyesight stops working for a couple of seconds as her face slams into the bathroom mirror. As the glass shatters around her, she sees the dark white of horror instead of the quiet black of unconsciousness and remembers what it is to fear. Rosa picks herself out of the puddle of shattered glass, bile rising in her throat as she watches her every movement break into pieces around her.

Her own blood pours down her face in disgustingly thick rivulets. She whimper, pathetically, pulling a thick shard from her hand. Oh heavens. She might actually lose this fight. The Reverend is waiting-- looming-- in the darkness behind her. Rosa knows this, categorically, and forces her vision to return.

"Cone now, Apostate. If you come quietly I can see about letting your... owner say goodbye before I put you to sleep."

"She prefers the term Mistress, if you must be vulgar," Rosa mumbles, putting all her weight onto her wrists to keep herself from losing vertical status.

Why this is the important thing to clarify, she doesn't know. She should really be arguing against being subjected to absolutely devastating pain and, perhaps, complain about the way she's being treated by a legal official because even if this is policy she hasn't done anything recently to merit this sort of roughhousing.

"And I'm not the one who sent me into slavery!" She snarls, snarling at her own shattered reflection in what remains of the mirror. "So mocking me for it isn't going to earn you any points!"

Rosa grabs one of the larger shards of glass, wielding it like a knife. It's not a particularly clever strategy; the ragged edges of a dead mirror are not the same as a dagger hilt. She wields it like one all the same. Blood and pain are insignificant when you're this angry.

"You're supposed to be two miles underground! Instead you escaped your handlers." The Reverend hisses, narrowing her eyes. Her own dagger is far beneath the bathtub; going to collect it would be suicide. Rosa glares at her and holds her glass-knife before her like it might actually be effective.

"I did no such thing! I was fighting for my son's life one moment and then I was waking up in a slave market!" Rosa kicks her between the legs, right in the nook, instead of stabbing her. She winces as the kick makes contact; even thinking about it is unpleasant.

Rosa's victim doubles over and yowls, her hands flying to her genitals. Hopefully she's killed some
future children with that blow. One dead child... cannot be repaid with any other. But. Well. This woman shouldn't reproduce anymore; she's almost 300. She's had enough chances to add to the population.

"You ran off!" She hisses, kicking Rosa in the shins. Rosa swears but holds her ground; running away is not an option right about now.

"Yes, I ran off after I was chemically sedated, after spending weeks languishing in prison, shackled, starved and beaten." Rosa snaps, getting her by the hair and yanking until a handful of it comes out. The noise that comes out of her mouth is gratifying.

The sudden, agonizing feeling of a glass shard being stabbed into her thigh isn't quite as lovely. Rosa screams-- her vision sparkles like snow in the moonlight as her blood pressure threatens to flat line from the combination of two stab wounds, hard fighting and the sudden release of pent up anger. Her balance wavers but she pulls it together, exhaling sharply.

She throws herself at her assailant, slamming her into the glass wall of the shower. The judge's head smack backwards with a resounding 'twang'; she yelps and Rosa thanks every higher power that the glass didn't shatter. That would probably be more than a little... messy. Also she's going to need to clean herself up after this--

Rosa brings herself back to the present and smacks her head into the shower door once more, ripping a pained groan from the now-disoriented woman's throat.

From the other room she hears someone pound on the wall and shout 'SHUT UP! HOW MUCH SEX CAN TWO WOMEN HAVE!?'

They stop fighting for a few seconds. Rosa blushes and her fighting partner looks horrified. Rosa takes the opportunity and tackles her. Their combined weight sends them stumbling into the bathroom. Rosa falls on top her, of course, but is very quickly thrown off. She is the smaller woman in this fight. There's a momentary stillness of time as they struggle for dominance. Rosa is, with a surge of anger and a feral screech, the victor.

There's nothing to stab her with, nothing to shoot her with and the nearest thing to bludgeon her with is the crystal vase of roses on the coffee table across the room and Rosa would hate to kill flowers. Imperial judges...? Not so much.

She digs her knees cruelly into her victim's sides until she howls in pain-- which is the point-- and immediately goes for the kill.

That's not metaphorical. She's going to murder her. And she's going to enjoy doing so. Rosa wraps her hands around her throat, savoring the feel of her pulse shaking beneath her skin like a topsail cut loose in a maelstrom.

Her esophagus crumples beneath Rosa's fingers like a piece of wet paper. The judge claws furiously at the backs of her hands, raising blood-- Rosa ignores this and keeps squeezing, thumbs struggling to force her throat into her spine. She digs her knees into her broken ribs, smirking as the other woman's agonized scream fails to make it past her fingers. Her feet struggle against the marble of their hotel room floor, boots leaving long streaks of black. Her eyes, a beautiful shade of purple that Rosa would love to own a dress in, go from narrowed with rage to wide with fear as it finally sinks in that she isn't going to let go. No matter how deeply she manages to get her claws under the skin of Rosa's hands, no matter how much of Rosa's blood seeps out of her stomach onto the carpet-- she isn't going to let go.
"You said it yourself. You're alone," Rosa says, coldly, wondering if this is true or not. For vengeance’s sake, she hopes it is. Nothing is worse than being alone, abandoned even by the dead.

She can feel her blood pulsing against her hands, an improperly placed tourniquet that's nevertheless effective. Rosa keeps squeezing until she can feel her vertebra, like fragile little wings hiding within a cloying mask of flesh. She keeps scratching at her wrists until the very last, chest swelling like a balloon as her trapped breath finds absolutely nowhere to go. It's intoxicating to feel the struggle-- to know that she's the one in absolute control of the one thing every creature should be able to do themselves. Breathe.

She misses being able to do that without feeling the weight on her back.

Rosa knows that her time has almost come when a surge of strength almost sends her toppling off her. She's done this before, however, and manages to keep her hands tight around her throat. Rosa rises up on her knees and bears all her weight onto her hands. A vertebra snaps, there's a 'hrnk' of pain-- one last feeble scrape of her fingers down Rosa's hands and her hands fall down, limp. Rosa smirks, hollowly. She brings the palms of her hands together and squeezes. There's no air flowing, anymore, no attempts to get it in or force it out. The woman is either unconscious or dead at this point-- there's a pool of blood slowly spreading out from where the curtain rod stabbed her. The yellow sclera of her eyes are slowly turning the same color of her irises, flooded with her own blood. She maintains her vice grip until she's absolutely positive there's not a single twitch of a pulse beneath her fingers.

She doesn't want to feel good about this. But she does. She most certainly does. She took her son from her and she took the woman's life in turn. Beating her senseless would only have given her a fleeting satisfaction but this? This makes her feel good.

Something is, once again, right in the world.

Rosa is still covered in blood and standing over the body, staring into a fathomless emotional abyss, when someone knocks. Her head snaps around forty-five degrees and all rational thought leaks out of her ears. She can't think of what to do.

The door opens. Rosa holds her breath and prays it's not a member of the hotel staff. It isn't. It also isn't Marcus or Mindfang. He is, however, dressed like Marcus and carrying a sword. He's clearly not a nobleman either, and Rosa quickly processes the fact that he is, probably, another pirate. Breaking into the bedroom of his competition and the competition's apparently hapless lover. The man enters with his back turned to the carnage behind him, thankfully shutting the door. He begins to adjust his coat, a process that Rosa knows will take quite some time.

Rosa slips over to the open armoire and grabs a knife out of the coat of Mindfang's jacket. She manages to remain unseen and unheard for the moment-- mostly because as the intruder turns around it becomes apparent that he clearly wasn't anticipating finding a dead woman on the floor. He yelps, sounding more like a cat being shaved than a muscular man seeing a strangled corpse.

"Who are you?" Rosa asks, softly, amazed at the fact that her voice isn't shaking as much as her hands. He jumps, moving closer to the couch than to the door-- thank heavens.

"What the fuck is goin' on," he demands, a thick accent characterizing him as from a much lower class than Mindfang, as her trademarked clipped accent is nowhere present. "Did Mindfang put you up to this? Because she's got another fuckin' thing coming if she thinks this is an effective negotiation tactic-- I'm more than up to the task of beatin' her in a fight--"

Rosa looms out from behind the armoire and snarls. He actually screams this time and she takes the
opportunity to-- well-- dash across the room and stab him. It's a much easier murder than the other one, surprisingly. Do pirates usually have sedate office meetings in fancy hotels? She thinks not. He dies very quickly; a knife to the heart does that. Rosa pays no attention to his gurgling nor his frantic struggling to stay alive.

Should she feel bad about this? She should feel bad about this. But she definitely should not because both of them deserved it. Didn't they? Yes, they did. Her hands are shaking, wildly, with adrenaline, adrenaline that doesn't subside as the door opens once more.

This time it is Mindfang. She enters the door face-first, scouting the room and-- therefore-- immediately spies Rosa standing over a dead man with a knife in her hand. Rosa drops the knife instinctively, as if this is somehow going to make her less guilty.

"Well. Glad to see you're feeling better?" Mindfang says, voice emotionless even as she gets visibly concerned. Rosa doesn't bother to say a word; at least the guy on the floor was killed humanely. She hasn't seen the other one yet.

She shuts the door and is immediately confronted with the more visceral death. Mindfang stares at her and the visible carnage with unconcealed horror. Rosa is surprised by this, mostly because she's still in the mood to murder something and her sudden appearance is rather putting her off the homicidal urge. That doesn't mean she doesn't want to-- she does. The litany of offenses Mindfang has committed against her rises almost unbidden to the forefront of her mental landscape. Yes, it would be wise to kill her now while she has the opportunity and enough time to fade into the night, forgotten and unmissed. Rosa eyes her.

It's obvious she doesn't know what to make of any of this; her face is the color of a newly minted silver coin and she's not carrying a single weapon. The dead man at her feet is still armed and, presumably, she had a plan to deal with that but is nevertheless unprepared to deal with her domesticated jade blood’s fury.

Rosa growls. Mindfang growls back, the noise false and unconvincing as it screeches upward sharply into a plaintive note. Her ears flicker back and forward, oscillating between aggression and hope that she might be hearing Rosa wrong.

She isn't. Rosa breathes sharply out of her nose, clenching the dagger in her right hand. Her palm is still streaming blood from her impromptu weapon taken up against the slain Reverend. The inebriating odor of freshly spilt blood coats her nostrils and throat, making it very difficult to focus on the reasons she shouldn't kill Mindfang.

Reasons such as...? She stops growling for a moment. Shit. What are the reasons she shouldn't kill her? This shouldn't be a difficult question; she knows there are good reasons. Reasons such as... the woman says she's in love with her. She's keeping Rosa under her protection. She's... got money. And Rosa's hardly going to be able to get on board Mindfang's ship with Mindfang dead. It would probably upset Marcus if she murders her. Um. She's pretty? And Rosa does like her stories. There are more. Many more that very quickly make themselves known to her after a perfunctory assessment of Mindfang's virtues. Rosa ignores those as the more sensible part of her knows that acknowledging those reasons will make it vastly harder to kill her.

"Don't even think about it." Mindfang hisses. Rosa glares.

"Unfortunate choice of words, don't you think."

"Rosa, don't make me--"
Why not? Why not. Why the hell doesn't she make it an even three? Uneven three. Whatever. Rosa lunges for her and manages to catch her off guard. Mindfang yells as she's slammed into the door. She manages to kick Rosa in the shin as she gets her hands around her throat, a gesture that does not defer Rosa's attempt to strangle her. The strangulation lasts less than a minute before Rosa suddenly feels as if her skull was crushed.

The pain intensifies every time she breathes until she's struggling to keep from screaming. Rosa feels inexorably inclined to look in Mindfang's eyes.

*Fuck*. Rosa's fury leaves her in a flood of sudden realization. *Fuck*. Her hands weaken completely, arms fall to her side and her eyes can't leave Mindfang's face. She tries. She tries with everything she has which really should be restated as 'nothing' as Mindfang has very effectively *taken it*.

Mindfang grabs her by the throat with a single hand. Not to strangle her but rather to angle her head back to look her more deeply in the eyes. Rosa still has it in her to attempt defying the compulsion but...

Oh. *Oh* look at that. She has such beautiful eyes. Even that weird one with the eight pupils? Yes, even that one, shut up. Is that her? That doesn't sound like her. Yes it is, shut up.

Okay. Very beautiful eyes. Nothing weird. Sounds just like her. This is normal. Nothing odd. She's perfectly okay. Nothing to be concerned about. Mindfang's grip on her throat relaxes. Rosa doesn't look away from her eyes.

"Well. We've got lovely little problem on our hands now, don't we?" Mindfang asks, sweetly, smiling. And, despite all logic, Rosa feels her face smiling back.

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