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A Man in Desperate Need of a Gunner

by Mia Sundby

The new gunner was frustratingly normal. If Wickham was being honest, he was a little disappointed with the whole situation. Of course, he understood that Crumbs had to retire --she was getting old even for a gnome, and she'd been threatening to buy a seaside home with her *incredibly patient* wife for going on four years now-- but he was reluctant to let the old gunner go.

She was, as far as he was concerned, irreplaceable. She knew exactly what powder type worked best with the cannon, she knew the sweet spot for firing the ballista, she was always on time with her order requests for Kav -- Wickham's trusted bosun, and she was just the right amount of insane. It was hard to find an employee to fill those boots.

Moreover, she was family. She'd lived and worked on the Outsider for nearing six years. She'd been one of his first crew members, and she had, for some reason only the gods could divine, stuck with him through thick and thin.

But, as Zylphia (his no less trusted but certainly more *rude* navigator) had reminded him, change was good.

Now, Wickham simply had to keep reminding himself that as he sat on the other side of the pockmarked tavern table. Reaching for his tankard, he took a swig. The beer at least was the same at the Old Maid as it had been for years.

Barely restraining a sigh, Wickham glanced down at the sheaf of parchment Kav had handed him last night. His bosun was seated to Wickham's left, somehow squeezed into a chair that would have been oversized for Wickham, but for the ten feet tall bosun was little more than a stool. Kav was Wickham's brother in so many ways, yet polar opposites when it came to appearances --

aside from the fact that Wickham would have described them both as two of the handsomest devils to ever fly through the skies.

Where Wickham's tan only just hid his pasty skin, Kav's was a deep brown, darker than the wood of the table at which they were seated. Where Wickham was pushing five foot ten and was built arguably on the slimmer side, Kav was built, well, like a giant brick shithouse. When Wickham entered a room, people looked at him. When Kav entered a room, people hurriedly looked away and pretended they were doing anything else.

If it weren't for the man's job title, Wickham likely would've told him to piss off for a bit before he scared off any of the interviewees. They were, after all, in desperate need of a new gunner.

The current interviewee, and potential new gunner, seemed unperturbed however.

This struck Wickham as odd, particularly as she did not look like anything special at all. She was human, of average height, with pale skin and long brown hair tied back from her face in a loose plait. Her eyes were a sort of blue, though they looked more grey in the flickering light of the tavern, and she had a pleasant enough face. The most notable things about her were that she seemed built like a fighter, or at least worked out enough to look like one, and she had a couple of small scars on her face --one on the right side of her lips, one on the left edge of her jaw and one across the bridge of her nose.

There really wasn't anything that special about her at all. It was almost, Wickham mused, as though she were trying to look as unmemorable as possible.

Glancing down at his parchment, he took another swig of beer. The stuff was getting old, really --Wickham remembered when he'd first tried the ale here. He'd been blown away by its crisp taste and zesty overtones. But now...

Well. Maybe it was time for a change.

"So," he said, "What did you say your name was again?"

The woman smiled, the scar on her lips all but disappearing as she did so.

"Isobela Rhinde."