

The Flying Scotsman

A "Pirates of the Caribbean" fanfiction by Molly Joyful

Rating: PG-13

Genre: humour, adventure, slash

Pairing: Norrington/Gillette

Other characters: Voltaire, Lord George Cutler Beckett, cameos by Lt. Greitzer, Lt. Groves, Will Turner and Prince Frederick of Prussia. Also: various leprechauns, mermaids, one will-o'-the-wisp and a fairy (wingless).

Warnings: none

Author's notes: I thought that "Tómas" was the weirdest story I've ever written. Well, I was wrong! "The Flying Scotsman" is a wacky fairytale, unlike anything I've written before. But I sure had a lot of fun writing it, trust me on that!

Summary: Lieutenant Thomas Gillette on a quest to find his captain. There is nothing that a leprechaun wouldn't do for his treasure, so all is not lost for James Norrington.

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You might think fanfic's not right
But see, the pirates, they don't mind
So, just for once, pretend you're blind.

Oh copyright, I honour thee
So there's no point in suing me
And C + Ds would be a folly
Respectfully,

Yours, Joyful Molly"

Once more with feeling and in legalese:

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Chapter 1

Finding an intruder in his bedroom long past bedtime was one thing; seeing said intruder sitting on the fragile writing desk and reading the draft of his book quite another. Especially the young man's chuckling while leafing through the pages of his precious manuscript infuriated Frederick greatly. For a moment he considered calling for the guards, but he didn't feel threatened by the visitor, found the situation more embarrassing than dangerous and finally, curiosity won over caution.

"What? What? Have you come here to murder me? Then know that I will fight to my last breath! I will!"

"Yes, yes, I know. You will cut me in little pieces and feed me to your dogs," the young man said. He was dressed to the latest fashion in a suit of dark green velvet, and his shoes were decorated with the biggest silver buckles Frederick had ever seen. He wore no wig; the red, unpowdered hair was held back in a simple pigtail. "Your 'Anti-Machiavel' isn't bad," he said, giving Frederick a charming smile. "To be honest, I'd expected worse, despite dear Voltaire's praise. Of course, the text could do with some editing, and you really need to work on your syntax, but all things considered, Your Royal Highness does have a talent for writing. Ah, bloody titles, far too complicated. I'll call you Fred."

Prince Frederick, future King of Prussia, sat up in his bed and crossed his arms over his chest. "I almost admire you for your rudeness," he said. "Would you now please put my manuscript aside and explain who you are, what you want and how you managed to get past my guards? And even more important: what do you mean by saying that you've 'expect worse'? And you're not French. What business do you have with Voltaire?"

The young man hinted a bow and put the bundle of papers carefully aside. "My apologies. My visit must be quite confusing. You see, it's against my principles to beg for an audience; I prefer a more informal approach. As for your questions: I came here by coming in, Voltaire is a distant cousin of mine, I've expected worse because the last member of a royal household writing anything that made sense was Elizabeth I., and I'm here because I'm looking for Mr. Greitzer. Oh, and my name is Thomas Gillette, I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance."

Frederick's head was spinning, and not only because of Gillette's stream of words. Only now, with his eyes getting accustomed to the dark, Frederick could see that his visitor was actually not *sitting* on the desk, but *hovering* an inch above it in the air. He got goose pimples and broke out in a cold sweat.

"You - are not of this world," Frederick gasped.

Gillette shrugged. "That depends on your point of view. We live in the same world, but not in the same place. Too difficult to explain. I'm a leprechaun."

"A - what?" Frederick couldn't help it, he had to laugh. "A leprechaun? That's ridiculous!"

"A word of warning, Fred my friend: if you should try to educate me now that I'm supposed to be a small gnome with a red beard and spending my days mending shoes, I'll set your manuscript on fire."

Frederick looked from his manuscript to Gillette and then back again, swallowed hard and decided it wasn't worth the risk.

"Let's assume that you really are a - well, what you said you were, and that I don't suffer from a hallucination. You claim to be my dear friend Voltaire's cousin, and with all due respect, I've never heard of a French leprechaun!"

Gillette waved him off. "I said he was a cousin, not a brother. Good grief, even a mermaid could tell he's not a leprechaun! He's an *Ignis Fatuus*, or, more commonly known, a will-o'-the-wisp. They're very intellectual, but have absolutely no sense of direction. Anyway, we're not here to talk about him. You have a man called Adrian Greitzer serving in your guard, I understand?"

Frederick shrugged. "Do you have any idea how many soldiers are serving in my guards? How on earth could I know each of them?"

"I would do my best to know every man on whom my life could depend if I were you," Gillette said sternly. "You might take that into consideration for your future career."

Frederick thought about it for a moment. "You do have a point there, Mr. Gillette. I have no idea why I feel I have to help you, but I will order my servant to look for Mr. Greitzer. Please come back tomorrow night, I'll hopefully know more by then. However, I'd be curious to learn why one of my guards would be of such importance for you?"

Gillette drummed his fingers on the desk. "It's a very long and complicated story. I have a cousin - not Voltaire - named Seirse. George in your language. Lord George Cutler Beckett, to be more precise. Dear George caused a lot of trouble; he almost managed to get half of the ships of the fleet destroyed. As an officer of the Royal Navy, I'm very annoyed. And he-

"You? What? There are leprechauns serving in the Royal Navy?" Frederick scratched his head. "Well. That explains a lot. So you think Mr. Greitzer can help you to find your cousin?"

"Yes. Or rather, he might tell me what happened to George. He's served under him in the right honourable East India Trading Company, and was with him when their flagship went down. I have to find George, because George can tell me what happened to my captain."

"I fear I'm beginning to lose track of all the actors in this drama," Frederick said. "What captain?"

"James Norrington. My captain." The wistful look on Gillette's face didn't escape Frederick; he'd seen that expression all too often, usually when looking into the mirror.

"Your captain? I see."

Gillette looked a little embarrassed, and straightened out the cuffs of his coat to keep his hands busy. "James Norrington died aboard a cursed ship, the *Flying Dutchman*. It's very simple: I need to find Mr. Greitzer who will help me to find George who'll help me to find the *Flying Scotsman* where I hope to find my captain."

"*Flying Dutchman*," Frederick corrected.

"Pardon?"

"It's the *Flying Dutchman*, Mr. Gillette. You said *Flying Scotsman*."

"Oh, but it is the *Flying Scotsman* now," Gillette assured. "She's sailing under a new command."

Chapter 2

Greitzer felt queasy on his way to the prince. For the life of him he couldn't think of any reason why he had been summoned, and as its human nature to assume always the worst, he was quite certain that this evening would not end well for him. He could hear faint music coming from the prince's study. Flute and piano? The prince had a visitor then. Getting closer to the study, Greitzer noticed to his great surprise that Frederick and his guest didn't play one of the prince's favourite pieces by Bach or Händel, but "The Gallant Seaman's Suffering". It was a pretty lewd song Greitzer had often heard aboard the ships of the East India Company and in taverns, but never expected to encounter in a palace!

A servant led Greitzer in the study, then left him to his fate, closing the door. Frederick was fully concentrated on the music, and so was the man playing the piano. During his service in the East India Trading Company, Greitzer had learned a thing or two about fabrics; Lord Cutler Beckett had been obsessed with silk and velvet. While waiting for the music to finish and Frederick to take notice of him, Greitzer had a closer look at the man whose pale fingers seemed to dance across the keys of the piano. He was red-haired and wore a suit of finest grey silk. Greitzer had to hide a smile; he could imagine how Lord Cutler Beckett would have reacted upon such an observation. 'Grey? Grey? There's no such thing as grey, Mr. Greitzer! Silk can be taupe or silver or dove-coloured. Why am I punished with such uninspired peasants?'

"I really hate to interrupt your thoughts, which are, without a doubt, of great importance to the future of our country and maybe even the world, but still, I'd be very grateful if you could pay some attention while I'm talking to you, Mr. Greitzer."

Greitzer, realising to his great horror that the music had ended and he'd been addressed by the prince, snapped to attention.

"My apologies, your highness," he stammered. "I didn't mean to-"

"Never mind," Frederick cut him off. "An old friend of yours is here. He undertook a long journey to see you."

The piano player stood up and turned towards Greitzer. It took a moment for the pfennig to drop, but when he realised who was standing next to the prince, Greitzer blinked.

"Lieutenant Gillette?" He couldn't have been more surprised if a kraken had materialised in front of his eyes, and past events considered, he'd much preferred the kraken over Norrington's former first lieutenant.

"Not an old friend then," Frederick stated dryly. Greitzer shook his head. While not an enemy, Gillette certainly wasn't a friend, and "old" simply wasn't the correct term to describe him. Greitzer felt old, military service had taken its toll on his body and mind, but Gillette didn't look a day older than the last time he'd seen him. When had that been,

anyway? The great battle had taken place almost ten years ago. Gillette hadn't been there, so - at least twelve years, and Gillette hadn't changed a bit!

"Old shipmates, though we have never served in the same ship," Gillette said. "I very much approve of your new uniform, Mr. Greitzer. It suits you far better than the one of the East India Trading Company." He turned to Frederick. "Blue and yellow, Fred. Yellow! Can you imagine? I'd have looked like a red-tailed blue-and-yellow Macaw in that uniform! Very unbecoming."

"So you joined the Royal Navy because their uniform matched your hair?"

"My dear Fred, I'm not *that* shallow. At the end of the day, I can wear whatever I want, I'll always look like a lighthouse. Now, Mr. Greitzer, I'm looking for Lord Cutler Beckett, and I hoped that you could give me some information on his whereabouts."

Greitzer, who had followed the conversation between prince and lieutenant with increasing confusion, shook his head.

"Lord Cutler Beckett is dead, Mr. Gillette."

"Yes, yes, I know, that's what everybody tells me. But let's assume for a moment that he wasn't - where would I find him?"

"But he *is* dead," Greitzer insisted. "I was there; I've seen it with my own eyes! Lieutenant Groves ordered us to abandon ship, and the last I saw of his lordship was him descending the stairs to the main deck. The *Endeavour* was blasted to pieces, Mr. Gillette. No man could have survived that!"

"No man, that's true," Gillette agreed. "What about Commodore Norrington? Were you present when he died?"

"No. He wasn't on the *Endeavour*. He died on the *Flying Dutchman*, and I wasn't aboard her at that time. Lieutenant Groves was on duty."

Gillette arched his eyebrows. "Ah, my dear old friend Theodore Groves. I'm looking very much forward to seeing him again. Now, one last question, Mr. Greitzer. Do you know the coordinates of the spot where the *Endeavour* sank?"

"I have noted them down in my journal," Greitzer replied. "But I don't understand why this is of any importance. It all happened so many years ago. Let the dead be buried, I say."

"Under different circumstances, I'd agree with you, but in this case, none of the dead in question was *buried*, as you just admitted. Thank you for your time, Mr. Greitzer. Would you be so kind to fetch your journal now? And you wouldn't happen to know where I can find Mr. Groves, would you?"

"Last thing I heard he has rejoined the navy," Greitzer replied. "But that was almost nine years ago. For all I know, he might be dead by now. Or married. Or both."

"Is there anything else you need to know from this brave man here?" Frederick asked.

"I don't think so. He's been a great help."

Frederick, hands clasped behind his back, turned to Greitzer.

"Dismiss."

"Yes, sir," Greitzer automatically said, and hurried to get out of the study, followed by Gillette's cheerful laughter.

"My dear Fred, you just gave a perfect impersonation of Commodore Norrington! I admit, I'm very fond of you, which doesn't make my departure easier."

"Well, your company was certainly enlightening and enjoyable," Frederick said. "A pity I can't tell anybody about it, least I wish to be declared not of sound mind. When will you leave?"

"As soon as Mr. Greitzer returns with the coordinates. Then I'll know where I have to look for dear Seirse. I hope I can convince Voltaire to accompany me on this journey."

Frederick winced. "Voltaire? Why on earth would you need to drag Voltaire with you on this lunatic quest?"

"What a silly question," Gillette said impatiently. "Why, because of the mermaids, of course!"

Chapter 3

"This wine is sour." Expression of disgust on his face, Voltaire pushed the glass in front of him towards Gillette. "Sour, sour, sour. It's a disgrace. And the clothes we are wearing? Eyesores!"

Gillette, who was just about to empty his third tankard of ale, just shrugged.

"Only a man who has never seen a uniform of the East India Trading Company could complain about the one of the Royal Navy," he said. "And this here is the best wine in Port Royal."

Voltaire sniffed. "Being the best wine in Port Royal is like being the most intelligent person in Versailles. Among the blind, the one-eyed is king." Looking around the tavern, he wrinkled his nose. "And as we're already talking about cleanliness: this place is filthy. I can't believe I agreed to be dragged here, Tomás! And just in the middle of a ground-breaking experiment, too!"

Gillette rolled his eyes. "All your experiments are ground-breaking, or at least house-wrecking. You still haven't explained the huge hole in the entrance hall of Château de Cirey. Did the husband of your Marquise finally see sense and fire a cannon at you?"

"Nonsense. The Marquis de Chatelet a man of common sense and would never blow holes in his own castle. The Marquise and I were experimenting with gunpowder; I'm afraid I made a mistake when setting the decimal point in the recipe for the mixture... but enough of that. The experiment you so rudely interrupted could be of greatest interest to Britain."

"Indeed?" Gillette asked with badly concealed sarcasm. "How exciting."

Voltaire looked left and right, to make sure they weren't watched, then lowered his voice.

"Very exciting. The Marquise and I have figured out a way to destroy the French fleet. Or the British. Or Spanish. We haven't decided on a fleet yet, to be honest. But to please you, let's say we're talking about the French fleet."

Gillette, resting his chin on his hand, arched his eyebrows. "I appreciate the thought. And how, if I may ask, do you and the Marquise plant to destroy a yet not determined fleet?"

Voltaire leaned towards Gillette. "It's so simple, yet so brilliant," he said. "We'll use giant burning glasses!"

"Giant - what?"

"Burning glasses. Why, are you hard of hearing? You must admit, the idea is fantastic! No more cannons, no more gunpowder, just burning glasses with a diameter of 12 feet, attached to the bow of each ship, setting the enemy's fleet on fire. Deadly! Effective! Brilliant!"

Gillette pinched the bridge of his nose and groaned.

"My dear cousin, this is without the doubt one of the most spectacular ideas you've ever had. But what, pray tell, will you do if a battle should take place on a rainy day?"

Voltaire froze. "What?"

"Rain. Water from the sky. Wet. When it's raining, there's no sun. No sun, no fire."

"Well, then..." Voltaire rubbed his chin. "I guess we just have to make a new law that prohibits sea battles on rainy days then."

"Excellent idea," Gillette said. "I think you and the Marquise should focus on the destruction of the Swiss navy for the time being. A test run, so to speak."

"The Swiss navy? But Tomás, the Swiss Confederation is landlocked..."

"That's the idea, yes."

"Luddite." Voltaire gave Gillette a contemptuous look, then reached for his glass and took another sip of the sour wine. "What are we doing here, anyway? Nothing but unwashed, boorish seamen, and not one pretty woman in sight. I'm not surprised that *you* enjoy such company, but really, I can't see why--"

"We need a captain of the Royal Navy," Gillette interrupted the rant. "A drunken captain of the Royal Navy. Captain Reggins, to be precise. See? There he is, at the table in the corner. Three sheets to the wind; once he's at four, we'll seize the opportunity."

"What opportunity?"

Gillette drummed his fingers on the table. "Cousin, you're really dear to my heart. But the occasional dim-wittedness of your family is beginning to grate on my nerves. We need a ship, or did you intend to swim across the Caribbean Sea? Wait here; it's time for me to join my new friend for an ale or two."

Gillette stood up and headed for the table where Captain Reggins was staring dolefully in his tankard. Voltaire watched his cousin ordering ale, then sitting down next to the man. He was well acquainted with Gillette's modus operandi. Like most leprechauns, he knew well how to trick mortals and pull the wool over their eyes. He'd always thought that being a leprechaun was far more fun than being a will-o'-the-wisp. Making farmers dig for nonexistent pots of gold was entertaining; haunting the bogs and carrying a lantern was exhausting and one always caught a cold and ruined the stockings.

Captain Reggins slumped down on the table, and despite the noise in the tavern, Voltaire could hear him snore. Gillette stood up, a folded piece of paper in his hand and a smug smile on his face.

"Did you get what you want?" Voltaire asked upon Gillette's return.

"Of course. I always do. Here are his papers and orders; we'll put to sea tomorrow."

Finally Voltaire saw through Gillette's true intentions.

"His papers? You want to steal his boat! Admit it! Are you insane? They will shoot us! Hang us! Make us walk the plank!"

Gillette waved him off. "Don't be such a drip. We're not stealing the boat, because a), it's a ship, and b) we'll return it, eventually. And the navy doesn't make anybody walk the plank; that's the prerogative of pirates. A pity, really. I'd sure love to make our dear cousin Seirse walk the plank."

"But Tómas, the captain will wake up latest tomorrow and realise that you've stolen his papers and his boat, I mean ship, that floating vessel," Voltaire argued desperately. "They'll catch up with us in no time!"

Gillette grinned. "Don't worry about that, cousin. I put some of Nana's Waking Dream Drops in his ale. He won't wake up before Friday."

Voltaire threw his hands up in horror. "Nana's Waking Dream Drops? Good grief, Tómas, what have you done? Yes, he'll be asleep for three days, but he'll also turn into a pig!"

Gillette shrugged and put his hat on. "The transformation is not permanent, and I really doubt anybody will notice the difference, cousin. A pig with a wig? I've seen worse around here."

He headed for the door, and Voltaire followed, cursing his fate.

Chapter 4

It was not only due to the suffocating heat in the great cabin that Lieutenant Groves sweated like a horse under the many layers of wool and linen of his uniform. Finding that Thomas Gillette was his new captain rather than Captain Reggins contributed greatly to his discomfort. Gillette was supposed to be dead, lost in the hurricane that had claimed the *Dauntless* and far too many lives. Yet there he was, in his immaculate uniform, no hint of sweat, not one wrinkle on his youthful face. Not even a gray hair! Groves, thinking of his own receding hairline, couldn't help but feeling resentful.

"I can tell that you're surprised, Mr. Groves. So was I when I learned that you've sailed under the flag of the East India Trading Company and the command of Lord Cutler Beckett."

The acid in Gillette's voice didn't escape Groves, and it irked him.

"With all due respect, sir: I have a family to feed and couldn't afford to stay ashore on half pay. It's not like I didn't try to help Commodore Norrington; there just wasn't a way for me to-"

Gillette cut him off with a dismissive wave of his hand. "Mr. Groves, here's an advice that you might wish to take to heart for your future career: don't follow men who are greedy for power and gold."

"Well, then I may better leave the service, sir; it will be hard to find a captain that would fit your requirements."

"Good point," Voltaire chipped in.

Groves studied him coolly; he didn't approve of passengers in the first place, and then a frog, of all people! That didn't escape Gillette, and he hurried to introduce Voltaire.

"This is Monsieur Arouet, Mr. Groves. He's here to... he's supposed to... he will..."

"I'm here upon invitation by the Admiralty," Voltaire said quickly. "I will carry out a series of experiments which are of greatest importance to the Royal Navy. And to the future of the British Empire," he added, lowering his voice as if he was talking of a state secret.

Groves' face lightened up. "That's splendid news. I can assure you that officers and crew will support you in every possible way. What kind of experiments will you conduct?"

"Experiments with dolphins."

"Dolphins?" Gillette and Groves asked in unison, both looking equally confused.

"Indeed, dolphins. My invention will increase the sailing speed of the fleet significantly," Voltaire explained with great enthusiasm. "Such a simple method, yet so effective! I've developed a harness for dolphins. Just like carts are pulled by horses, ships will be pulled by

dolphins. Twenty to thirty for a ship of this size here. Amazing, isn't it?" He sighed happily. "And I'm already planning flying ships which will be carried by giant flocks of seagulls, atta-

"That's - brilliant," Gillette muttered.

Voltaire smiled smugly. "I know."

Groves preferred not to speak his mind; he cleared his throat and turned to Gillette. "Your orders, sir?"

"Our mission has changed, Mr. Groves." He took a small piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to the lieutenant. "This is our course."

Groves studied the note. "But that's where-

"Yes, that's where. On your way, Mr. Groves," Gillette said sternly, and Groves obeyed, leaving the great cabin. As soon as the door had closed behind him, Voltaire began to laugh.

"Cousin, what on earth is wrong with you? That uniform, that tone - it's ridiculous! The very moment we came aboard this ship, you've changed completely. You speak and behave like a mortal!"

"Honour, honesty, loyalty, humility and dedication to the service are the values I was taught by my captain, and those are the values I'll adhere to," Gillette said with pathos. "At least as long as I'm wearing this uniform."

"Very admirable. Very honourable. Very boring," Voltaire commented. "I can't wait to meet that formidable captain of yours. He must be a stunning sight to make up for all his virtues."

Gillette thought of Norrington's crooked teeth and decided to ignore the comment. By the standards of their kind, Norrington's looks probably ranged on the same level as those of a troll.

"There's one thing I'm curious about: why were you not there during that epic battle? Why haven't you been by your captain's side when he was in sore distress? You've been very harsh with the poor lieutenant, but from all I can tell, you haven't covered yourself with glory, either."

Gillette began to pace up and down the cabin, hands clasped behind his back.

"I haven't left by choice, I assure you. Seirse caught wind of James Norrington giving Captain Jack Sparrow one day's head start when he escaped. Back then, I made it very clear that this might be a gentlemanly, yet also very stupid thing to do. But did James listen? No. And of course Seirse had to use this to his advantage, pulling strings and calling in favours in London, trying to topple my captain. I knew that, and warned James. And what did he do? Started to chase that cursed pirate! From here to there and back again - lunacy! He became quite obsessed, and didn't listen to any sense or reason. Or me."

"And then?" Voltaire asked, captivated by the story.

"And then he gave orders to sail through a hurricane. Through a hurricane, can you imagine? I protested; not only because it's really uncomfortable to walk around in a soaking wet uniform, but also because it could have cost the lives of so many men."

"You protested? Why so complicated? You could have just turned him into a toad. Really, Tómas, you're the least imaginative leprechaun I know."

Gillette sighed and sat down, looking very sad. "He asked me to calm the storm. But I'm only a Leprechaun, not a merrow; I don't have such powers. I told him that we should sail home and mind our own business. That's when he called me a mutineer and ordered me off the ship. What could I have done? He *ordered* it. I had no choice but to take my pot of gold and leave. The ship sank, and I believed them all to be dead."

Voltaire sucked air through his teeth. "Ordered away by the one you love - that's terrible! Didn't he know the consequences? What happened then?"

"I returned home; what else could I have done? But I'd lost all fun in leading on farmers, and there are only so many times you can count the gold in your pot. Not to talk of the countless unmarried young ladies that mother invited for tea. She has 487 grandchildren already, how many more does she need? And I've missed my captain, as you can imagine. It goes without saying that I started looking for him when I learned that he had survived. But it was too late."

Voltaire patted Gillette's shoulder. "No need to despair; I'm very certain we'll find your captain. History is full of stories where lovers find their way to happiness despite misfortune and obstacles and annoying cousins. Just think of Romeo and Juliet!"

Gillette gave him a sidewise glance. "They died."

"Now did they?" Voltaire scratched his head. "My apologies. I never managed to sit through one of Cousin William's plays to the end."

Chapter 5

Groves tried to be as tactful as possible. "This might help to ease your - indisposition."

"What hellish brew is it this time? I must have tried everything short of cooked frogs," Voltaire grumbled, and wiped the sweat off his forehead. He had just sacrificed his breakfast to the fishes for the third time that day, and slowly lowered himself onto the deck, giving the tankard in Groves' hand a suspicious glance.

"This ship doesn't carry frogs," Groves said dryly. "We're British. You may drink this without fear; it's tea with rum and ginger."

"Ginger! Leave me alone with ginger! It was ginger which brought me in this predicament in the first place, after all!" Voltaire glared at Gillette, who arched an eyebrow and wrinkled his long nose.

"I think the word you've were looking for was auburn, sir," he said icily.

"Not at all, mon capitain." Despite his previous protests, Voltaire took the offered tankard, frowned and then downed the content in one. He pulled a face. "Disgusting! I dare say I'd preferred the frogs. But thank you anyway, Mr. Groves. At least one compassionate soul aboard this ship."

"You're very welcome, sir."

"In return for your kindness, I'll share a fascinating linguistic detail with you, Mr. Groves," Voltaire said. "'Auburn' actually evolved from 'alborne', a French word used many centuries ago to describe blond hair. With that knowledge, would you consider 'auburn' an appropriate description for our dear captain's hair colour?"

Groves paled and took the empty tankard from Voltaire's hands. "I... well... one could... depending on the light... my apologies, I think somebody just called for me." A quick bow of the head, then Groves hurried to get away and escape further discussions which could only end in trouble for all involved.

Voltaire, despite still feeling sick, couldn't help but chuckle. "There goes my saviour. But now tell me, what on earth is the appeal of this profession? How can anybody enjoy being aboard a ship? The heat. The food. The filth. Orders and rules and regulations. It seems to me that I've never been in a more hellish place. Or a more boring one."

Gillette kept his view on the horizon. "This life is very different from the one that our kind leads, that's true," he admitted. "But it wasn't until the day that I met James Norrington that I had a purpose."

"A porpoise? Couldn't you just have kept a monkey like everybody else?"

"I said purpose! Everybody needs a purpose, after all."

Voltaire shook his head. "Who needs a purpose when you can have fun instead? And anyway, how much longer will this journey take? I'm heartily sick of the sea. Literally."

"We're almost there, dear cousin. Tomorrow, if the wind doesn't change."

"And then?"

"Then we'll see."

* * *

"Five bells. Time to leave."

"There must be a less cruel way to tell the hours," Voltaire groaned, fingers in his ears. "Bells, in the middle of the night! Even the dead would awake! Do the lunatics on this swimming apple barrel never sleep?"

"The ship never sleeps," Gillette explained. "You'll get used to it." The creaking of the planks, the muffled voices and steps of the officers on watch above them, the snoring of the seamen - all those noises had become part of his life. He had missed them, just like the smell of fresh tar, tobacco, rum and the sea. Those noises and smells would forever remind him of James Norrington, just like his mother singing him to sleep and the smell of burning peat would always mean home to him.

"I said, have you finished watching that fly on the wall? Hull? Thingy?"

"Oh? Yes. Of course," Gillette murmured, who hadn't paid any attention to his cousin's words. "We don't have much time. First we have to dress for the occasion, though." He blinked, and gone was his uniform. Instead, he wore a fine suit of green velvet with silver buttons and large silver buckles on his polished shoes. A huge black pot appeared in front of him, filled with gold.

Voltaire sighed. "Can't we, just for once, stay informal and not drag all your otherworldly possessions with us?"

"A leprechaun never leaves anything behind," Gillette said sternly.

"That sounds like a motto humans would come up with. But fine, fine, I won't argue." Voltaire blinked as well and was gone, reappearing seconds later as a small, ghostly light next to Gillette.

"Ready? Then hold fast to my coattails, or you'll get lost."

"Do you see any hands?" Voltaire protested, clearly insulted. "The obvious aside, I certainly won't get lost!"

"You're a will-o'-wisp, cousin. Getting lost is the purpose of *your* life. Sit on my shoulder then."

Muttering and cursing Voltaire did as he was told. Gillette could feel an icy breeze on his cheek, but whether this was due to the nature of a will-o'-the-wisp or because his cousin was angry, he couldn't tell.

"I can't believe I let you talk me into this, Tómas," Voltaire muttered. "I could be with my Marquise now, and I can assure you that we'd find better and more pleasurable ways to spend our time than hunting for mermaids! Indeed, even sitting over Frederick's manuscript and crying over his grammar would be more entertaining!"

"Quit whinging," Gillette said, unimpressed by the protests. His hand closed around the pot handle, and after a blink, they disappeared and the great cabin was empty.

Chapter 6

As expected, the wreck of the *Endeavour* couldn't be found where it was supposed to be. Of course, a ship didn't sink straight to the bottom of the sea. Ten years of currents and drifts had to be considered, but Gillette could make out the silhouette of the former flagship of the East India Trading Company in the far distance.

"There she is. Hold on tight, cousin, we'll go for a walk."

"I fail to see the attraction of this place," Voltaire complained. "And I'm wet. I'll catch a cold!"

Gillette glared at the flickering light on his shoulder.

"The cold is a viral infection, you peasant. You can't catch it just because you're wet. I'll never understand why this is called the Age of Enlightenment; I can't remember a more uneducated century!"

"That's because you never attend family reunions. You should talk to cousin Galileo, he could tell you a few stories that would curl the hair on a bald man's head!"

Gillette ignored him and moved his pot of gold from his left arm to his right. Of course he could just have blinked and be at the site of the wreck within a moment, but he feared that he might miss pieces of the wreck scattered across the sea bottom. Pieces which could give him a clue on the whereabouts of Lord Cutler Beckett. That aside, he quite enjoyed the walk. Having spent so much time *at sea*, it was interesting to see what it was like *in* the sea. There were plants and animals; some of them in shapes he'd never seen before. Swarms of small fishes crossed their path, and a curious shark came to inspect the intruders into his territory.

"A shark! A shark! Quick, make us disappear!" Voltaire cried, and hid in the collar of Gillette's coat.

"Will you come out of there, please? You tickle," Gillette snapped. "And stop being such a drip. See? He's very friendly, he just wants to play."

Saying that, he patted the large shark on the nose. The animal looked at Gillette in as much confusion as a shark was capable of, then he gently nudged his hand and swam away.

Voltaire, still shaking like a leaf, returned to his place on Gillette's shoulder.

"You are completely out of your mind. Why oh why have I left my beautiful castle and my beautiful Marquise and let you talk me in to this adventure?"

"First, it's not *your* castle, but her husband's. And second, it's great fun, the noble purpose aside. Oh, but now we must pay attention." He gestured with his head in direction of the wreck. "We've been noticed, cousin."

Voltaire could see a swarm of large fishes swimming towards them. At first he thought those were sharks, but then he could see that it was a far more dangerous species.

"What are we supposed to do?" he asked, and Gillette could hear the fear in his voice. "I've never had any dealings with mermaids."

"You just stay where you are and let me do the talking. And if I tell you to do something, you'll do it. Understood?"

"Understood. Oh, oh, oh. I dare say, the tales praising the beauty of mermaids were a bit exaggerated, were they not?"

"Shhh," Gillette hissed. "They are very sensitive when it comes to their looks."

Voltaire was right, of course. The legends of mermaids who were luring unfortunate seamen to a watery grave with their beauty and beautiful singing were mostly just that - legends. The only true part of the story was the watery-grave-one. And it was less a luring and more of a dragging. Mermaids had the attention spans of trouts and got bored very easily. Their endless quest for entertainment and distraction would make them circle shipwrecked men like sharks and eventually drag them to their dwellings. Not passed on to the afterlife, but also not among the living anymore, the poor souls would be held captive, forced to sing and dance and tell tales. Once the mermaids got tired of their entertainers, they'd release them back into the sea and finally into the much welcomed peace of death.

There were now twelve of them, circling Gillette and Voltaire with curiosity and caution. The shipwrecked green of their bodies, ending in two scaly tails, provided perfect camouflage. The matted long hair, of a greyish-greenish colour, was adorned with mussels, sea slugs and sea anemones, and could easily be mistaken for seaweed. They had only four webbed fingers with claw-like, razor sharp nails. But the most horrifying about them were their faces. Oh, those faces! Whoever had written poems about the beauty of mermaids certainly had never had to look into those ghostly white eyes, and seen the sharp black teeth behind a lipless mouth!

"They look terrible," Voltaire whispered. "I'll never eat fish again!"

"Will you be quiet now," Gillette hissed back. "Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder; we probably look as ugly to them as they do to us. Well, *you* certainly do."

The mermaids stopped circling them, and one left the swarm to swim towards Gillette. She was now floating right in front of him, and he could see the gills on both sides of her neck. He put his pot on the ground and bowed his head.

"My greetings, dear cousins. I'm Tómas of the Southern Forest, and this is my cousin, Voltaire."

The mermaid fixed her dead eyes on Voltaire, who was very tempted to go and hide in Gillette's collar again. But then he took a deep breath and his light, which had been flickering, shone steady and with a warm glow.

"The light! You've brought a beautiful light with you," she finally said and smiled, exposing her fangs. "Light is rare here, we have to live in the dark."

"How regrettable," Gillette said. "In that case, you certainly wouldn't mind if we kept you company for a while? I have important business to discuss with you, and while we're talking, Voltaire will bring you light."

"That's insulting! Who do you think I am, Voltaire the rent-a-lamp?" Voltaire muttered.

"If you don't quit complaining immediately, I'll tell them that you're the best story teller in the world, and they'll keep you here for all eternity!"

Voltaire grumbled, but refrained from further comments.

The mermaids discussed Gillette's suggestion, and finally, the one who had been talking to Gillette nodded.

"We welcome you, cousin Tomás of the Southern Forest, and also you, cousin Voltaire of the Shining Light. But tell us, what business is it that brought you here?"

"Ah, this and that and then some more," Gillette answered cheerfully. "But first and foremost, we're looking for our cousin Seirse of the Western Waterfall. He was on the ship over there when it sunk."

The mermaid turned her head and looked at the wreck of the *Endeavour*.

"Oh, you mean the Emperor of East India?"

"The - *who*?" Gillette asked, thinking that he'd misheard.

"Seirse I., the Emperor of East India," she repeated. "He and the imperial household live with us, and we're very honoured by his presence. He knows so many tales! My favourite is the one where he fought back the Royal Navy all alone, with only a toothpick for a weapon, and then his encounter with Captain Jack Sparrow, who asked him to become captain of the *Black Pearl*! And I love the funny story how he locked his red-haired cousin in the privy and-

"Enough," Gillette interrupted her. "Yes, that's definitely my cousin. Seirse I.? I can't *wait* to see him again and pay my respects."

"Then please follow me," the mermaid said. "He will certainly be delighted to see you."

Voltaire chuckled into Gillette's cravat; dear Seirse would certainly not like the kind of respects his cousin would dish out.

Chapter 7

The mermaids had made themselves at home in the wreck of the *Endeavour*. Voltaire was fascinated by the spawn-like constructions attached to the hull; he could see the curled-up bodies of sleeping mermaids behind the gelatinous walls of those bowers, gently rocked by the current.

Their guide had introduced herself as Barbel, and she had obviously taken a shine to Gillette. Voltaire had to be careful not to be swatted by one of her fins while she wrapped them playfully around his cousin.

Gillette also had a good look at the place, but he was more interested in the fastest escape route than in sleeping mermaids. He also couldn't help but feel that they were being watched.

"Your home is very beautiful, Barbel."

The mermaid smiled and showed her horrible teeth, making Voltaire shudder.

"How kind of you, Tómas. Why don't you stay with us? It would make me very happy."

She moved a little closer and put her arm around Gillette's shoulder. Voltaire saved his life by jumping on Gillette's tricorn, sitting there like a shining cockade.

"Your offer is too generous, but I'm only a humble leprechaun," Gillette said gallantly.

"Yes, and he's married! And his wife is a harpy! And they have twelve eggs to look after!" Voltaire snapped.

"Oh, what a pity." Barbel looked disappointed and withdrew her arm. "Why did a dashing leprechaun like you choose a harpy, of all the women? They are ugly!"

"I like her sunny personality," Gillette said smoothly. "Plus I'm hardly at home, anyway."

Barbel pulled a face, but didn't make further inquiries. They had now reached what had once been the upper gun deck of the *Endeavour*. Gillette's jaw dropped and he looked around in wide-eyed disbelief.

Where once thirty 32 pounders had dominated the picture, there was now a display of lavish luxury. Carpets covered the planks, Greek and Roman statues had taken the place of cannons; heavy velvet curtains hid the hull. Elegant furniture completed the interior, and though they were at the bottom of the sea, there were no mussels clinging to the curtains, no starfish to the statues, and no algae soiled the brightly coloured carpets. There was only one explanation for that.

"It's magic," Voltaire whispered in Gillette's ear.

"Indeed. And there's the reason for this miracle."

He pointed at Lord Cutler Beckett, sprawled on a Chippendale sofa, with a crown askew on his head and dressed in enough yellow silk and gold to make the sun turn pale. A mermaid offered him a plate with sardines, and a man in a brown coat with mustard-coloured stripes was busy writing in a journal.

"Oh Emperor, you have guests," Barbel announced, and bowed her head. "Tómas of the Southern Forest and Voltaire of the Shining Light have come to see you!"

Cutler Beckett jumped up, sending the plate with sardines a-flying.

"Tómas!" he cried. "My dearest, most precious and beloved cousin!"

He ran towards Gillette and hugged him so hard that Voltaire only barely escaped being squeezed to death. "Insufferable git," he grumbled.

"How wonderful," Cutler Beckett exclaimed. Then he lowered his voice. "About bloody time you came to save me. What kept you?"

Gillette was too flabbergasted to reply, and he couldn't take his eyes off the man in Cutler Beckett's company who glared daggers in their direction.

"Seoirse," he hissed. "What on earth is that fairy doing here?"

"Oh, you mean Robert?" Cutler Beckett looked over his shoulder, then he shrugged. "Don't pay any attention to him. He's only my accountant."

Chapter 8

"I just *love* family reunions". Cutler Beckett reached for a fishcake. "A fairy, a will-o'-the-wisp and two leprechauns are having tea. That sounds almost like a bad joke, doesn't it?"

Voltaire, changed back into his normal form and nibbling on dried seaweed, thought that any joke involving a fairy could only be bad. Just like Gillette, he avoided any dealings with the fairy folk. Some fairies were just playing harmless pranks, but more than one poor leprechaun had found himself into serious trouble after encountering one of those sneaky little gits. And Robert the accountant with his pointed ears and cold eyes wasn't a very confidence inspiring representative of his kind.

"It must be a joke told among lower class leprechauns then, my lord," Robert said with a sourly smile. "One that peasants might enjoy."

Gillette's ears turned red, a signal warning of an imminent verbal explosion.

"Indeed, Master Robert, for peasants have a good sense of humour. Do you know the one of the fairy who got stuck on flypaper and had to cut off his wings to escape?"

Now it was Robert's turn to get angry.

"First: fairies don't have wings. Or do you see any wings here?" He turned and showed the back of his coat. "See? No wings. Second: humans won't invent flypaper until 1846. Lamentable lack of education in the bogs, I see."

Gillette gave Robert his most arrogant glare, the kind reserved for obstinate midshipmen and admirals. "At least we in the bogs don't get stuck in daffodils with our arses," Gillette snapped. "And that aside, I-"

"Friends! Cousins! Countrymen!" Cutler Beckett interrupted the two squabblers. "We shouldn't waste our time with arguments; let's find a way to rescue me."

"And me," Robert added slightly offended.

"Oh – yes, yes, of course. You as well. Now, what is your plan, Tómas?"

Gillette leaned back in his seat.

"I have no plan yet. Tell me first why I find you here, eating sardines with a fairy."

Cutler Beckett sighed dramatically.

"You're so terribly, terribly old-fashioned, Tómas. Or maybe you've just spent too much time in the navy. A leprechaun's place is where the business is, and where could there be better business than in the Honourable East India Company? There is gold, cousin, so much gold! We have to go with the times. Trade is the future of our kind. But as you can imagine, I'm

very busy, so I needed a secretary and accountant to keep an eye on my fortune. And who would be better suited for such a task than a fairy?"

"Indeed," Robert said. "I'm proud to say that I'm completely without compassion and conscience, but blessed with impeccable manners and excellent fashion sense."

"How interesting." Voltaire wrinkled his nose. "In that coat, you look like a bloody potato beetle."

"But now tell me how you ended up with the mermaids, Seoirse", Gillette hastened to ask, and glared at Voltaire.

"Ah - a disastrous combination of unfortunate circumstances. We were attacked by barbaric, unwashed pirates and that insolent Will Turner. When the *Endeavour* went down, my pot of gold fell into the sea, and I had to rescue it, of course. And what do I see? Two mermaids! Holding my pot and playing with my gold! But just when I wanted to chase them off, a rainbow appeared in the sky. Cursed things, they have terrible timing. So here I am, at the mercy of a species with little to no business sense."

"You're treated well for a servant." Gillette looked around. "Not bad for somebody who's supposed to be at the mermaids every beck and call."

"Shhh," Cutler Beckett hissed. "Will you tone it down, please? They don't know I have to grant them three wishes."

Voltaire dropped the seaweed he held in his hand.

"But – Seoirse! That's against the law!"

"As expected, you are wrong," Robert said. He snipped his fingers, and a huge book bound in green leather appeared in his hands. He began to leaf through the heavy tome until he found what he'd been looking for.

"Here. § 45, article 78 et seq. of the *Law concerning the Rules of Conduct for Leprechauns* clearly states that a leprechaun whose pot is found at the end of the rainbow is condemned to grant the man who found it three wishes."

He closed the book. "I think even a will-o'-the-wisp should be able to tell the difference between a *man* and a *mermaid*. It's a clear-cut case."

Voltaire gave Robert a smug smile. "Well, if that's the case, why is his imperial highness here not simply taking his pot and leaves, eh? Maybe not so clear-cut, after all."

"Unfortunately, I'm trapped here, though the law is on my side," Cutler Beckett said. "I'm a victim of miscarriage of justice! It's terrible. Sardines day in, day out. Not *one* business deal in ten years. I wish I were dead. But now you're here, and I've decided that you'll save me."

Gillette shifted uncomfortably on his seat.

"To be honest, that's not what brought me here."

"No? Why not? My well-being should take priority over your business, shouldn't it?"

"I'm not here for business, either. I'm looking for James Norrington."

"James – what?" Cutler Beckett groaned. "James Norrington? Why on earth would you want to look for James Norrington?"

"He's very dear to me," Gillette said simply. "And I need to find him. You know where he is, don't you?"

Cutler Beckett crossed his arms over his chest, looking very much like a petulant child.

"Yes, I know. But I won't tell you."

"Seoirse!"

"No, I won't. Not unless you save me from the mermaids. That's my condition. No liberty, no Norrington."

"That's blackmail!"

"Of course. What did you expect? That I'd help you for free?"

Cutler Beckett and Robert looked at each other, then they broke out in laughter.

"That was a good one, my lord," Robert chuckled. "For free! Who do they think you are - St. Patrick?"

"Tómas, I think we should go for a walk and see if we can find some sardines," Voltaire suggested, and stood up. He grabbed his cousin by the arm and dragged him away; Cutler Beckett would be of no use to them if Gillette should yield to temptation and turn him into an anchovy.

Chapter 9

"This miserable festering furuncle on the arse of honourable mound dwellers," Gillette cursed. "How can I help to free him? A contract is a contract is a contract. The law is clear; he has to stay here until he either grants the mermaids three wishes or they release him by their own free will."

"Then we'll have to convince them that they want to get rid of him. Shouldn't be too difficult," Voltaire grumbled. "I wonder why Robert the accountant stays with him; there's no love lost between fairies and leprechauns, after all. Where are we heading for, if I may ask?"

"The orlop," Gillette replied. "If James was injured, they'd have brought him there. Maybe we'll find something."

"Tómas, why are you so certain that you'll find him? Not that I want to crush your hopes, but by all rules of natures, he's very likely - not among the living anymore," Voltaire said, wording his doubts as tactfully as possible.

"By all rules of nature, neither you nor I would exist."

There wasn't much to say to that, so Voltaire followed his cousin down steep stairs and past algae-covered broken planks, wondering once again why Gillette walked in the first place. He'd only have to blink! The many years among mortals must have damaged his common sense.

They had soon reached the orlop, a place that couldn't have been more different from Cutler Beckett's luxurious dwelling.

"Cousin Seoirse doesn't seem to come here," Voltaire said. "I can't say I blame him. What a forlorn and gloomy place. I don't think you'll find anything here, Tómas. Oh – what is that?"

He picked up an item from the ground, scaring a swarm of tiny fishes which hastily fled the place.

Gillette cast a quick glance at it.

"Oh, that's a tourniquet. You need it for amputations. To occlude the blood flow."

Voltaire quickly dropped the tool and wiped his hand off his coat.

"Ghastly, absolutely and truly ghastly!"

"That's very true," Gillette said, but Voltaire felt that his cousin wasn't talking about the medical instrument of torture. He stared intently into the dark and frowned. Voltaire tucked on his sleeve.

"What's happening? Is anything amiss?"

"We're not alone," Gillette whispered. "We're being watched ever since we've arrived here."

"We better leave then," Voltaire whispered back, and turned on his heel, but Gillette held him back by the sleeve of his coat.

"You that you hide from us show yourself!" he ordered, ignoring his impatient cousin. "You have nothing to fear!"

Something moved in the darkness, and after a few moments, a figure approached them. It was difficult to tell what or who the strange being was; while roughly shaped like a human, it was green and its movements were like algae drifting in the water. There was such an air of misery and despair about the figure that Voltaire quickly made two steps back.

"Good grief, what horrible creature is that?"

Gillette didn't seem to be scared; rather than retreating, he approached the strange being. There was something about it, something familiar; not in its looks though, which should have frightened any man, but that was just the point, Gillette *wasn't* frightened.

The figure hesitated, then reached out what might be an arm and emitted a wailing sound.

"Don't be afraid," Gillette said, holding out his hand. "We do not mean to harm you. Please speak now, if there is anything you wish to say."

Another soft wail, and finally, an unexpected clear, almost child-like voice could be heard.

"Mr. Gillette, sir, is it true? Have you come to save us?"

Chapter 10

"Henry? Henry, is that really you?"

Gillette stared at the figure in disbelief, hardly noticing that Voltaire was pulling frantically on his sleeve.

"Tómas, who is Henry? And why does Henry look like bladder wrack?"

"That's one of the ship's boys who served under Captain Norrington's command."

"That's a ship's boy? Good grief. Who mans the cannons in the Royal Navy then, sea cucumbers?"

"No, those work at the Admiralty. Now be quiet." Gillette shook Voltaire's hand off and addressed the seaweed formerly known as Henry.

"Tell me what happened to you."

"Our ship sank, and we expected to die. But then Robert the devil came, and since then we're cursed."

Before Gillette could make further inquiries, Voltaire clapped his hands. "Robert the devil doesn't happen to wear a suit looking like a potato bug, does he?" he asked, all excited. "I *knew* there was something fishy about him, I knew it!"

Gillette glared at his cousin. "Could you please let *me* handle this?"

Voltaire was too proud of his detective work. "But it's true, isn't it? Robert the devil is Robert the potato bug?"

Henry nodded.

"Yes, that's him. He sold us to the mermaids, for ten pieces of gold each. That's what he does with every unfortunate sailor he finds in the sea."

Voltaire and Gillette both gasped in horror.

"He - sold you? He made you *slaves*?"

Even for a fairy, this was an unexpected level of evil. Freedom was the highest good of every mythical being, be they leprechauns, will-o'-the-wisps or fairies, and this was one of the reasons why mermaids were despised for their habit of keeping prisoners.

Voltaire shivered. "How horrible. How heinous. How harrowing. How h-"

"Yes," Gillette cut him off. "All that and more. We need to help them."

Voltaire began to glow, and his light revealed a large number of figures of similar appearance to Henry's. Only the Gods knew how many unfortunate men had been lured on to destruction by Robert the devilish potato bug, and denied a peaceful afterlife!

"This is an outrage! Yes, we must free them, and I'll personally drag Robert home and bring him to court! By his pointed ears, if I must!"

"Can you help us, sir?" Henry asked, hopefully. "We are so tired, sir, we haven't slept for many years. We just want to rest in peace."

"I will try anything in my power to save you," Gillette promised firmly. "Alas, it won't be easy, for I doubt the mermaids will give up their property without a fight. And then there's Seoirse. He's not my favourite cousin, but we can't just leave him here. And he's the only one who can tell me where I can find my captain."

Voltaire rubbed his chin, lost in thought. Suddenly, his face brightened, and he gave Gillette a sly grin.

"Ah, you take care of Robert, I'll take care of Seoirse and the mermaids. This problem needs a scientific approach!"

Chapter 11

Robert, looking up from his books, gave Voltaire and Gillette a suspicious glance upon their return, but the two looked like butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. Thinking of fairies as being far superior to leprechauns and their ilk, the idea that the two might pose a risk to his business didn't even cross his mind. He put the quill back on paper and added together once again his gains.

"Ah, there you are. Did you enjoy your walk?" Lord Cutler Beckett had changed into a robe of bright red, and rather than a crown, he was now wearing a tricorne made of red velvet, adorned with diamonds.

Voltaire shrugged. "We saw some seaweed and sea cucumbers - nothing special. You know what it's like; if you've seen one sea bed, you've seen them all."

"Indeed, indeed," his lordship agreed, barely hiding his boredom. "Unfortunately, nothing exciting ever happens here. So, how is your plan for my liberation developing?"

"All in its good time," Gillette grumbled. "But don't forget, dear cousin: once you're free, you will have to tell me where I can find James Norrington. Should you try to weasel out of your word, I'll personally carry you back to the mermaids."

"How can you doubt me? Me, your dearest cousin?" Lord Cutler Beckett dropped back on the luxurious sofa and covered his eyes with his arm. "That I must suffer such ingratitude! Robert, where is my *sel volatile*?"

"Dissolved, sir," Robert replied, not interrupting his work. "We're under water."

"I think I've seen rocks of sulphur not far from here. Maybe you could fetch some for his Highness," Voltaire suggested. "They are very smelly."

"I am an accountant, not a footman," Robert snapped. "I'd say that *you* are the expert for treasures of the soil here, why don't you go and dig some out?"

"Robert, stop being difficult. I want sulphur! I need sulphur! Fetch me sulphur! This is not a request!"

Robert slammed book and quill on the table and stood up.

"Your non-request is my command," he snarled. Then he left, but not without glaring daggers at Voltaire, who gave him his brightest smile and waved him off with one of the Marquise's embroidered handkerchiefs.

Once he was certain that Robert was out of earshot, Gillette hurried to the sofa and pulled his lordship up by the collar of his coat.

"How could you!" he cried, shaking his cousin hard. "How could you become accomplice to enslaving those men? Don't you have any honour? Have you forgotten all your mother has

taught you? By the Spirits of the Forest, I'll make sure you'll never put a foot on our green meadows again!"

"Have you lost your mind? Let me go! You ruin my suit!" Cutler Beckett squealed. "And what is this talk about slavery? What business do I have with slavery? What do you think I am, a mortal?"

Gillette didn't let go of him. He pulled him so close that their two long noses almost clashed, and Cutler Beckett began to feel very uncomfortable. He'd never seen his cousin so angry.

"I'm talking about the men in the orlop, the men your accountant has sold to the mermaids for gold, rather than allowing them to rest in peace! Are you trying to tell me you didn't know about it?"

"Robert? Sold them?" Cutler Beckett paled. "But Tómas, cousin - you know I would never do such a thing! It is true that I cherish gold above all else, but there are laws that even I would never break!"

Gillette let go of him.

"So you weren't aware of Robert's little business then?"

"Absolutely not. The cheek of him! Opening shop in my premises and not even paying rent! And of course, shameful about the men," he added hastily. "What are you planning to do now?"

Voltaire picked up one of the diamonds that had fallen off Cutler Beckett's tricorne, inspected it and put it in his pocket.

"Very nice. I promised my Marquise a souvenir from my journey, you see. Well then, here's my plan. It's all about the three wishes, Seirse. Do as I tell you, and you'll be free by sunrise."

"By sunrise?" Cutler Beckett sat up and looked at Voltaire with great hope. "Tell me what to do, and I will do it. I'd do anything to be free, as long as it won't cost me any gold."

Voltaire gave him a very stern look.

"Stand on the table, Seirse."

His lordship looked puzzled, but he did as he was told.

"And now?"

"And now? Now you'll sing."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said: sing, Seirse! The louder, the better!"

Cutler Beckett sent a pleading look at Gillette, but he only shrugged, indicating that he didn't have the slightest idea what Voltaire was up to.

"Oh well," Cutler Beckett sighed. "There's no harm in trying."

He cleared his throat, and the next moment, he began to belt out "Stay, Prince, and hear" from Purcell's Dido and Æneas.

Chapter 12

The annual conference of the Westland Banshees singing the anthem of their chapter couldn't have produced a more ghastly wailing than the screaming and moaning of the mermaids rushing into Lord Cutler Beckett's quarters like a swarm of startled mackerels.

"Enough!" they screamed, their webbed hands firmly pressed against their ears. "Stop it!" they cried, cringing in pain upon hearing his lordship's voice, which, at best, could be described as atonal.

Barbel grasped Voltaire, who stood closest to her by the shoulders and shook him hard.

"Make him stop," she cried. "Oh please, Voltaire of the Shining Light, have mercy and make him stop!"

"Is this your wish, fair mermaid?" Voltaire asked. "Are you really certain that you wish him to stop?"

"I do! I do wish it with all my heart!"

"Well then!" Voltaire rubbed his hands. "Seoirse! Did you hear? She wishes you to stop singing! It's indeed her greatest wish!"

Cutler Beckett halted mid-verse, torn between delight that one wish was off his shoulders, and insult that he had to perform in front of such an ignorant audience.

"Oh, silence, blessed silence," Barbel sighed. "I never thought any living being could produce such noise."

"You haven't heard cousin Tomás snoring yet," Voltaire quipped, only to be elbowed in the side by Gillette. "That's a ghastly sound, I assure you!"

"I don't believe that," Barbel said, and if she'd had lashes, she'd batted them at Gillette. "You have a very lovely voice."

"Yes, he's an all-around lovely fellow. Such wit, such spirit!"

"And such lovely hair," Barbel sighed. She swam circles around Gillette, pulling teasingly on his pigtail.

Voltaire perked up his ears.

"Very lovely, I much agree. It's rare to find such a shade, just look how shiny it is!"

"Have you gone mad?" Gillette hissed. "What are you thinking, waxing lyrical about my hair?"

His cousin ignored him.

"So shiny... I wish I had hair like that," Barbel said wistfully.

"Are you certain of that?" Voltaire asked, trying to hide his glee. "Is it really your wish to look like a red lighthouse on fire?"

"Indeed," Barbel confirmed.

"You can be helped. Seoirse?"

Cutler Beckett, who had followed the exchange with increased confusion, finally caught up with the conversation. He blinked and clapped his hands, and within seconds, the seaweed was gone and Barbel's head was graced with auburn locks, reaching down to her waist. Voltaire quickly produced a mirror, and held it in front of the mermaid.

"Oh! Oh! How beautiful!" she exclaimed, shaking her head and laughing. "Look, your highness, my hair is red!"

"Auburn," Gillette muttered.

Cutler Beckett gave his cousin two thumbs up and mouthed "only one to go", then he turned to Barbel and smacked his lips.

"How absolutely stunning! It's red, no doubt," he said, smiling smugly. "It's the reddest hair that ever sprouted on a mermaid's head. I envy your beauty, Barbel."

The mermaid was in love with her reflection in the mirror, and couldn't stop shaking her hair.

"Lovely, so lovely. Oh, how I wish you all could have hair like mine!"

"Oh no, you don't," Cutler Beckett protested, turning very pale all of a sudden. "You can possibly not mean that!"

"But I do!" Barbel giggled. "You and your cousin and Robert the accountant - I wish you'd all have red hair. You'd be very handsome. Yes, that's my wish."

Cutler Beckett sighed.

"Don't even think about it, Seoirse," Voltaire cried, but it was too late. He snatched the mirror from Barbel's hand, and to his great horror, his former dark brown hair was now a shade not unlike the one of chestnuts.

"By all Spirits of the Forest, what have you done? My hair! My beautiful hair!"

"Quit the whinging," Cutler Beckett snapped, tearing his wig off his head and revealing red stubbles. "I can never go without a wig again! But at least I'm free now, and-"

A piercing shriek interrupted any further discussion. Robert stormed in, pushing the mermaids aside, jumping around like a little goat, tearing out his now very red hair with both hands.

"Who was it?" he screamed. "Who did that? I'm disfigured! Disgraced! Dishonoured!"

"And I'm disgusted, but for completely different reasons," Gillette snapped. He blinked, and Robert found himself put in green irons. Gillette grasped him by the scruff of his neck and dragged the screaming and kicking fairy toward the orlop. "Time to face the music!"

"Music?" Barbel looked very confused from Voltaire to Lord Cutler Beckett. "What does the lovely Tomás mean?"

"He means that truth will out," Voltaire explained.

"Oh." The mermaid wrapped a strand of her newly red hair around her finger. "I still don't understand, but I'm glad to know that his Highness won't be singing again."

Chapter 13

Robert put up a fight, but thanks to Gillette's iron grip and the occasional helpful kick up his backside from Voltaire, they eventually arrived in the orlop. The mermaids had followed them, chatting among themselves, their fins twitching nervously. Voltaire couldn't stop looking at their sharp teeth, and he worried what would happen if they should decide to fight for their slaves. He had a plan, of course, but one never knew.

Robert, finally realising that the whistle had been blown on him, protested loudly. "Why have you brought me here? I don't like this place! I demand to return to my quarters!"

"Demand all you want, but first you'll explain to us *this*," Gillette said firmly. "Henry, show yourself!"

"Yes, sir," came the reply from the darkness, and soon, Henry and his fellow prisoners moved forward. Robert paled and tried to struggle free, but Gillette and Voltaire wouldn't have any of it.

Cutler Beckett swallowed hard. "What - who is that?"

"One of our story-tellers," Barbel explained helpfully.

"One of James Norrington's ship's boys on the *Dauntless*," Gillette corrected. "And your lovely accountant here sold him to the mermaids. Him and all the other men."

Cutler Beckett looked from Henry to Robert and then back to the dead seamen.

"I can't believe this. This is what you've done behind my back all those years? While I paid you a royal salary and allowed you a life in luxury? Such betrayal!"

"Bah, 'royal salary'," Robert grumbled. "Why be happy with the crumbs if I can have the whole bread? One should think a leprechaun would understand that, but this just goes to show that your time among mortals has ruined you. You're weak, and lost all sense for business."

Cutler Beckett's face turned so red that Voltaire feared he might soon explode.

"Lost my sense for business? Me? Seirse is the most cunning leprechaun of all, keep that in mind when I collect the award for delivering your thieving, lying fairy-arse to justice back home!" He looked over his shoulder. "I'm sure you don't want a share of the award, Tomás, seeing how I have done all the work here."

"I'm confused. Somebody explain, please," Barbel demanded, her arms crossed over her chest and her eyes narrowed. "Why does his Highness take Master Robert away? We don't like people leaving. We don't allow people leaving."

Gillette sighed.

"Barbel, I know that you are bored here. I'm very sorry about that. But you can't keep people with you against their will. And you can't buy people, either. Or sell them. That's against the law and against nature. We are all born to be free. You have no right to make people unhappy."

Barbel looked very sad.

"They are unhappy? But we treated them always kindly, and we love their tales."

"I know you did, but how would you like it if some fisherman would catch you in his net and then lock you up, only to exhibit you on funfairs?"

"That would be terrible," Barbel admitted. "But certainly nobody would do such a thing?"

"You have no idea," Voltaire said. "They would do that, and more! Remember what happened to cousin Tinkerbelle? Spent twenty years in a glass jar, serving as a reading light for the village apothecary!"

"But who will entertain us if we allow them to leave?" Barbel whined.

"Do not worry, fair mermaid," Voltaire replied smoothly, "I have just the thing you need." Out of nowhere, he produced a large, box-like object and placed it carefully on a barrel. "This will entertain you for centuries to come!"

Barbel swam a circle around the object, her interest caught. "Oh, how curious! What is it?"

"This? Ah, this is the greatest story-teller of all times!"

The mermaids gathered around the box, and watched Voltaire pushing a button, then turning a wheel. A bright light was blinding them, but once their eyes got used to the light, they could see two tiny people in the box, yelling at each other.

- *"I don't want smooth, just something that's less like roller-blading down the Himalayas with a rocket up me backside."* -

"Oooh!" The mermaids stared open-mouthed at the box. Voltaire grinned, and turned the wheel again.

- *"Congratulations, Jimmy! According to our test, you're Justin's father!"* -

"Please tell me you are joking," Gillette groaned.

"Not at all," Voltaire replied cheerfully. "Soaps and reality shows and quizzes and talking heads - this will keep them busy until the invention of the internet. So, Barbel, what say you? Are we allowed to leave and take your story-tellers with you?"

- *"For I am not Emily Kimberly, the daughter of Dwayne and Alma Kimberly. No, I'm not. I'm Edward Kimberly, the recluse brother of my sister Anthea."* -

"Barbel?"

"What?" Barbel asked, not taking her eyes from the box.

"We. Prisoners. Leaving. Now."

- *"Hey, I'm the Doctor, I can save the universe using a kettle and some string! And look at me, I'm wearing a vegetable."* -

"Barbel!"

"Oh? Oh. Yes, yes, of course. Have a nice journey home." She waved vaguely with one hand, and returned her attention to the screen.

Gillette nodded at Henry.

"Quick, we must leave as long as they are distracted."

Voltaire, Gillette, Cutler Beckett and a very reluctant Robert left, followed by Henry and the seamen. Behind them, they could hear the oohs and aahs of the mermaids.

- *"I have come up with a plan so cunning you could stick a tail on it and call it a weasel."* -

Quotes: EastEnders, Jeremy Kyle Show, Tootsie, Doctor Who, Black Adder.

Chapter 14

Gillette didn't stop before they had brought a good distance between themselves and the ship. Then he sat on a huge rock and let out a sigh of relief.

"Another adventure survived." Voltaire reached in the pocket of his coat and took out a flask, offering it to his cousin. "Here. To revive your spirits."

Gillette accepted gratefully and took a big swig.

"Rum. Bliss!"

He took another swig, then he handed the flask back to Voltaire and pointed at Cutler Beckett.

"I've kept my part of the deal, now you keep yours. Where is my captain, Seoirse?"

Cutler Beckett looked a bit uncomfortable.

"He died aboard the *Flying Dutchman*," he replied.

"Yes, I know that. But where is he now?"

"Aboard the *Flying Dutchman*."

"I'm not in the mood for joking, cousin. Where *is* the *Flying Dutchman*?"

Cutler Beckett chewed his lip. "I - have no idea."

"What?"

Gillette jumped down from his rock and grasped his cousin by the sleeves of his coat, shaking him hard.

"How dare you say you don't know if you promised to tell me!" he cried.

"Let go of me!" a struggling Cutler Beckett shrieked. "I promised to tell you where James Norrington is, and I've kept my promise! Not once did I promise to tell you where the *Flying Dutchman* is!"

Voltaire put his hand on Gillette's shoulder.

"Let him go, Tómas. As much as hate to admit it, but he is right."

Gillette hesitated a moment, then he pushed Cutler Beckett away. Without another word, he returned to his rock, sitting down with his back turned to everyone and sighing.

Cutler Beckett adjusted his coat.

"Well, I'll better be off then and bring Robert to justice."

"A good idea. The faster, the better," Voltaire snapped.

"Farewell, dear cousins, and if you should ever be in trouble again, please don't hesitate to call me. I offer special rates for relatives. Oh, and Tómas? Here's one advice for free: all good things come to those who wait!"

With that cryptical remark he blinked, and both he and Robert the fairy disappeared.

"Mr. Voltaire, is there anything we can do for Lieutenant Gillette?"

Voltaire turned around, and saw Henry standing there, turning his cap in his hands. Being dead aside, he looked like a normal lad again, and also the seamen behind him were back to their human form.

Voltaire sighed. "No, I'm afraid there's nothing we can do for Mr. Gillette, lad. But you're free now, you and your friends. You can leave to whatever afterlife mortals go to."

Henry shook his head.

"No, we can't. We have to wait."

"Wait? What for? Fair weather?"

"No. Means of transport."

Voltaire scratched his head. He turned to Gillette, who still sat on his rock, looking forlorn into the distance.

"Can you make head or tail of this, Tómas?"

Gillette didn't reply, but stood up and narrowed his eyes.

"What is?"

"There is something," Gillette said, and pointed southwards. "Something is moving towards us, can't you see?"

Voltaire couldn't see a thing, but he reached in his pocket and took out a spyglass.

"Wait a moment, let me see... good grief! You are right! There is something!"

"What is it? A whale?" Gillette asked.

"No." Voltaire began to step from one foot to the other, getting all nervous. "Believe it or not, Tómas, but it's a ship!"

Gillette looked puzzled. "A ship? Are you certain?"

"Absolutely, completely, perfectly certain." Voltaire scratched his chin. "That's amazing. After all, we're still thirty years from the invention of the first submarine!"

Chapter 15

It was an impressive sight. The size of a sixth rate frigate, the *Flying Scotsman* emitted an eerie green glow, and she parted the water without a sound. The figurehead was missing, and somebody had painted "under new management" on the hull. Gillette's heart skipped a beat - was it possible? Had his search finally come to an end? But as much as he craned his neck and narrowed his eyes, he couldn't see anybody on deck.

An anchor was dropped, dragging along the sand and then finally digging into the ground, bringing the ship to a sudden halt. Once it had stopped swaying and the whirled up sand had settled, invisible hands lowered a rope ladder.

"Finally we can leave," Henry said.

"What? *That* is your means of transport? The *Flying Scotsman*?" Gillette couldn't have looked more confused if Henry had explained to him that Lord Cutler Beckett had decided to join the Royal Navy.

"Of course. Didn't you know? Every seaman knows the legend. When you drown, you'll be ferried to paradise."

Gillette wrinkled his nose; he was insulted.

"How on earth am I supposed to know that? I can't pay attention to every yarn spun by sailors. That aside, our kind doesn't die. And even if we *should* die, we'd certainly travel with more style."

"Tómas, don't be such a snob. You've been looking for the *Flying Scotsman*, now you've found her. Be grateful and stop whinging."

Gillette gestured towards the rope ladder. "Time for your last journey, gentlemen."

None of the men moved, and Gillette began to get impatient.

"What are you waiting for? Captain's welcome?"

"Sir, we have to pay the ferryman first," Henry explained. "He won't allow us on board unless we give him a coin. But we don't have the money to pay him."

Having said that, Henry looked wistfully at Gillette's pot of gold. Gillette immediately sat on it, stretching his arms out protectively.

"Oh no! Absolutely not! Not my gold! Never!"

Voltaire elbowed him in the side.

"Don't be such a miser, Tómas," he said. "It's only gold, after all."

"Only gold? *Only*? What would you know about it?" Gillette looked very desperate, and patted the pot lovingly. "A leprechaun's gold is the proof of his skill. Without my gold, I am nobody!"

Voltaire put his hand on Gillette's shoulder.

"My dear cousin, I think freeing all those good men from the webbed clutches of the mermaids and exposing Robert the fairy's evil business prove far more skill than filling a pot with gold. And don't you think your captain would rather see you helping these men than polishing your gold all day? Certainly he didn't fall for you for your business sense."

Gillette took a few coins out of the pot and looked at them. Voltaire was right; James Norrington wouldn't have hesitated even a second to help a soul in need. Much time had passed since they'd last met, but no matter how the years aboard the *Flying Scotsman* might have changed his captain: of that Gillette was sure.

He dropped the coins back in his pot and addressed the waiting men.

"Gentlemen, each of you will take one of these coins - *one!* - climb up that rope ladder and then Godspeed."

Henry's smile almost split his face.

"Thank you, sir! You've always been my favourite officer!"

"Much good that does," Gillette grumbled, and looked away while coin after coin left his pot. The men lined up, and one by one climbed up the rope ladder. Henry was the last, and when he reached the railing, he turned around.

"What about you, sir? Don't you want to come aboard as well?"

Before Gillette could answer, the rope ladder was reeled in.

"You're still breathing, Mr. Gillette. I'm afraid you're not allowed aboard," a voice said regretfully. "I only ferry dead men. My apologies, I'm very sorry."

Chapter 16

Gillette turned lobster red and shook his fists.

"There will be much more to be sorry for if you shouldn't allow me aboard immediately, Will Turner," he yelled. "I'll make sure your wife will hear in all details about the incident with that wrench at the tavern at Tortuga, and then there's this little story about Anamaria and your breeches, and-"

"Mr. Gillette!" Will Turner appeared at the railing. He was a bit green around the gills, but that aside, he hadn't changed much. "I know you, you would never do such a thing!"

"Dare me! It will be in every paper and gazette! Especially the ones *she* is reading!"

Voltaire quickly stepped in front of his cousin. He took off his hat and bowed politely.

"Captain Turner, sir, I understand that there are rules you have to adhere to. But in the interest of Mother Nature's order, I have to clarify that Mr. Gillette is, strictly speaking, not a man, but a leprechaun, and as such immortal. Aren't there any exceptions for mythical beings?"

Will scratched his head.

"I don't know. If you're not dead, why do you want to come aboard the *Flying Scotsman*?"

"I'm looking for James Norrington," Gillette said over Voltaire's shoulder. "If he's aboard the *Flying Scotsman*, then I want to be there, too. If he's not, well, then on your way!"

"One moment, please." Will disappeared, and Gillette already worried that the *Flying Scotsman* would hoist anchor and leave without him when he finally reappeared.

"You may come aboard," he announced. "But you'll have to pay the fare."

"Of course!" Gillette looked into his pot, but alas, it was empty. Not one coin was left, and he looked at his cousin.

"Do you have any change?"

Voltaire shook his head.

"No, but why worry? Just blink and fill your pot!"

"You've really spent too much time in your bog," Gillette snapped. "Do you think we'd be so concerned for our gold if we just had to blink to get it?"

Gillette began to search frantically in his pockets, but alas, a dried grape aside, he didn't find anything which could have paid the ferryman.

"Would you accept a due bill, Mr. Turner?" he finally asked in desperation.

"No," Will replied, "but wait a second."

Again he left, only to return and throw two coins to Gillette.

"Here. Somebody's paid your fare."

Voltaire was the first to climb the ladder, closely followed by Gillette. Once on deck, he couldn't help but feel a pang of disappointment, for the *Flying Scotsman* did not meet his expectations of a ghost ship. No skeletons were hoisting the anchor, no ghoulish beasties haunting the deck. Instead, there were five sailors playing Nine Men's Morris, and one man with a peg leg smoking a pipe. That was the only unusual thing, considering that they were under water. The *Flying Scotsman* was as ordinary and boring as a ship could be.

Gillette cared neither for ship nor pipes nor Nine Men's Morris; the moment he set foot on the deck of the *Flying Scotsman*, he was looking for James Norrington. However, the man was nowhere in sight, and Gillette's heart sank. Had all been in vain?

"Welcome aboard, gentlemen," Will said politely. "I'd never expected to see you again." Looking at Gillette, he added: "I admit that I always thought you were a little bit - strange. So what are you two then? Ghosts?"

"Leprechaun," Gillette muttered.

"And my name is Voltaire. I'm a writer of most inspiring novels and sharp-witted essays, author of formidable plays, a historian and philosopher. I'm also a scientist, inventor, will-o'-the-wisp and his cousin."

"Leprechaun? Will-o'-the-wisp?" Will laughed. "I love a man with a sense of humour! Now, in all seriousness: what are you?"

Gillette sighed.

"Will Turner: you are captain of a ship which ferries the dead to the afterlife. You sailed on the *Black Pearl*. You met Calypso the sea goddess and the mighty kraken - both distant cousins, by the way. Good grief, *your heart is stored in a chest*, and yet you doubt *my* existence?"

Will shrugged. "I think this is all very strange. It does explain a few things, though. My wife always insisted that you're not of this world."

Gillette just wanted to make some rather unflattering comment about Mrs. Turner-née-Swann when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"He is telling the truth, Will. He is, indeed, a leprechaun." Gillette spun around, and found himself face to face with James Norrington. "My leprechaun."

Chapter 17

"... and when I woke up, I was still aboard the *Flying Dutchman*, but luckily, there was a new captain," Norrington finished his story.

"How fascinating," Gillette said, lying on the floor, his head in Norrington's lap, but Voltaire doubted that his cousin had paid much attention to Norrington's words. He'd spent the last hour gazing lovingly at his captain with a very dopey look on his face, but Voltaire, for the life of him, couldn't see the attraction. He was already four sheets to the wind thanks to Will Turner's excellent rum, but even that didn't help. Just *what* was it that Tómas saw in James Norrington? A plain looking man in an ugly uniform, with bad teeth and the eyes of a sad beagle.

He shrugged and refilled his glass. If Tómas was happy, who was he to judge? He only hoped they'd leave soon; he missed his Marquise and there were some fascinating experiments waiting for him back home.

"I don't know if that would be the term I'd use," Norrington said. "But now I want to know how you and your cousin found me. I've given up hope I'd ever see you again."

"How could you doubt!" Gillette was outraged. "I'd never give up on you; you're as dear to me as my pot of gold!"

"Is that good or bad?" Will asked Voltaire.

"Coming from a leprechaun, that's very good. It's a statement of great commitment."

"I see. Very odd. But please, do tell your story now, Mr. Gillette, I'm curious as well."

Gillette scratched his head.

"That's a complicated story. First we went to see the king, then we found Greitzer, made the captain drunk and stole his ship. Groves was surprised, but never mind, and then there were the mermaids and cousin Seoirse and Robert the potato bug fairy. We freed the imprisoned sailors, then you came, and here we are."

The confused faces around him indicated that none of those present had even the faintest idea what Gillette was talking about. He tapped his fingers impatiently on the floor planks of Will Turner's cabin.

"It was all very boring, trust me. The important thing is that we're here. And that I've come to save my captain. When are you ready to leave?"

Norrington sighed and didn't reply.

"There's nothing to worry about, James," Gillette explained cheerfully. "I'll take you home, and introduce you to my family. And as long as you don't insult any banshees, all will be well. Maybe my nana will give you a pot to fill as well, and then we can--"

"I'm afraid he can't leave, Mr. Gillette," Will interrupted him. "He's as much bound to this ship as I am."

"Not quite." Norrington gave Gillette a sad sideways glance. "Will's time is almost up. He had to serve as captain on the *Flying Scotsman* for ten years, then he's allowed to return to his wife. I can't leave, though. I'm cursed, Thomas; I can't pass on to eternity, and I can't return to life. So I'll have to stay on this ship till judgement day."

"And when will that be?"

"Nobody can tell."

"That sounds like a very long time." Gillette jumped up. "This is not acceptable! I didn't fight mermaids and fairies, not to talk of sacrificing my gold, just to go home without you!"

"God knows how much I wish I could change this," Norrington said. "The happiest hours of my life were those spent with you. But still, I'm grateful that I at least could see you again one last time."

Voltaire groaned and grasped for the bottle.

"Oh, for crying out loud, stop being so dramatic! This is not one of cousin Shakespeare's plays!" He took a swig straight from the bottle. "I do not agree with what you have to say, James Norrington, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it. Even if it's balderdash. There's something you seem to have in common, you mortals and leprechauns: you all lack common sense and imagination."

He leaned back and smiled happily.

"But luckily for you, I am here. Leave this up to me, gentlemen. There is nothing Voltaire can't fix!"

Chapter 18

Gillette hugged Voltaire for the fifth time.

"Have a safe journey, dearest cousin, and thanks so much for everything!"

"My pleasure. But I can't leave if you don't let me go, and my Marquise might begin to worry about my whereabouts if I shouldn't return soon."

"Oh, of course. My apologies."

Gillette, wearing his new uniform, let go of Voltaire, and returned to Norrrington's side. Norrrington smiled at him, he looked much younger and carefree, and for a brief moment Voltaire could see the man his cousin had fallen for. Not that James Norrrington could hold a candle to the Marquise, of course. He reached in his pocket - good, the diamond was still there. He'd have it set in a necklace, she'd certainly love that. Or maybe he could use it for a prism experiment?

"Thank you for taking me with you." Will Turner, all bright-eyed, bushy-tailed and dressed to the latest fashion, couldn't hide his impatience. "I haven't seen my wife for ten years; I don't think I could have waited another three weeks before taking her in my arms again."

Will and Gillette exchanged a firm handshake.

"Good luck to you, Captain Gillette. And to you as well, Lieutenant Norrrington."

The two saluted, and the whistle of an invisible boatswain cut through the water.

"Captain leaving ship!" he cried.

Gillette hugged his cousin again. "Don't forget us, Voltaire."

"Now will you let me go; it's embarrassing how sentimental you've become! I'll be back in five years, that's the time you'll need to refill your pot. My calculations are based on the average number of sailors drowning in this part of the ocean, the current fare for a one-way journey to eternity and the possible fluctuations due to inflation."

"And then?"

"Then? Oh, I forgot!" He reached in his pocket and pulled out a large roll of paper. "Here - I have an excellent idea for modernising the journey to the afterlife. See? It's very simple. You tie a giant teakettle to a carriage, and the power of the escaping steam will move it forward at great speed. I'll call it steam engine. Isn't it fantastic? No more captains or crews needed."

Gillette looked doubtful.

"And you think that will work?"

Voltaire put the plan away.

"Have I ever built anything that didn't work? Of course, the main problem will be to find a teakettle large enough. But don't worry, you can rely on me. Ready, Mr. Turner?"

"Very ready!"

Voltaire took Will's hand, winked one last time at Gillette and Norrington, then he blinked. Voltaire and Will disappeared, leaving only a faint green light behind, and the two officers were alone.

"Any orders, sir?" Norrington asked.

"If you call me sir one more time, lieutenant, I'll have you scrub the deck of this fine ship."

"Fine. Any orders, Thomas?"

"Yes. You, me, cabin, now. 3650 nights without you; that's enough."

Norrington laughed. He put his arm around Gillette's shoulder and pulled him close, then pressed a kiss on his temple.

"3648, Thomas. You forgot the leap years."

Gillette wrinkled his nose, then he dashed off in direction of the great cabin. Norrington chased after him, and while captain and lieutenant did their best to make night 3649 as memorable as possible, the *Flying Leprechaun* sailed peacefully towards paradise.

THE END

Post scriptum: According to a report by the "Fairy Herald", Robert Speirs aka Robert the potato bug escaped from Ireland before he could be brought to court. He fled to France, became a lawyer and started a revolution.

Feedback is always welcome: joyful_molly@yahoo.co.uk