

When people say 'fairy,' they think of cute, tiny, sparkly and clapping. My name's Fiona, and I'm not *that* kind of fairy.

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"Give me the prince, gorgon!" I shouted as my bladed wings slashed through the air. I stood in the gorgon's foyer, dwarfed by the carved columns, the massive marble statues and the wide staircase that led to a balcony spanning the entire mansion's length. A gaudy chandelier covered in crystals, filigree and candles hung from the ceiling high above and cast a soft, golden light across everything.

Towering over me, the enchantress with snakes for hair laughed. Her gauzy dress and velvet cloak winked with embroidered gems every time she moved. "I could crush you. And, what are you wearing? Are you a *pirate* fairy?" she hissed in disbelief. "Can you even *fly*?" She moved toward me, making a stomping motion with her shiny high heels.

At six inches high, I came up to only her ankle, but I continued to glare at her, defiant. I shook my wings out with a metallic ringing sound. "I can't fly, but I *can* fight," I replied with a smirk. My fingers flashed as I twined them into a series of shapes. In moments, I grew from the height of a teacup to that of a human. My black blouse, red vest, black trousers,

tall boots and tri-corner hat all changed size with me. Now that I was the same size, I looked her right in the eye. My sword whispered as I drew it from its sheathe. "How about a fair fight?"

Stone shards materialized from from the gorgon's fingers and flew toward me. Flicking my wings forward, I blocked and broke the rocks she flung. "Using magic? That's cheating," I told her. She growled, using her powers to rip chunks of marble from her stairs and railings. The masonry shot through the air straight for me. I danced around, dodging every attack.

"Stand still," she growled.

"Got him!" a tiny voice shouted at me.

"What?!" the gorgon turned to see a tiny fairy guiding a prince down a human-sized rope ladder from a window on the edge of the balcony.

As she took a step to go after them, I slashed at the chain holding the chandelier up. My dragon-crafted sword chimed like a bell, and I smelled sparks as the chain snapped. The chandelier crashed to the ground in front of the stairs, blocking her way.

"I don't think so." I grinned at her, spun on my heel, and darted through the doors behind me, two wooden monstrosities with massive bronze handles. With a bang, I slammed them closed.

From the pouch hanging from my belt, I took a thread of arachne silk, one of the strongest substances known in the Fae world, and quickly tied a sailor's hitch knot around the handles.

"Let me out! Give him back!" the gorgon screamed as she yanked at the doors. The wood bowed, but the knot held.

"Pleasure doing business with you," I called out as I lifted my black three-cornered hat and bowed with a flourish. Then I sprinted away, the sound of the gorgon shouting and pounding on the doors fading behind me.

As I neared the cove, the salt spray tickled my nose and the slap of the waves reminded me of a never-ending applause. I couldn't help but grin.

I skidded to a stop on the beach, throwing sand up in my wake. There, my three-masted frigate bobbed in the sea. Crouching, I launched myself at the ship, leaping over the side and onto the deck.

"Welcome back, Captain," my crew of fairies, merfolk, dryads, bugbears, gremlins, goblins and imps greeted me, their grins wide and triumphant. They clambered over the rigging, preparing for us to leave.

"Excuse me," a young man with wide eyes said as he approached.

"What is it, prince?" I said before I barked orders at my crew.

"She can't add me to her statue collection anymore, right? I'm safe now?" he asked, one fang poking out of his mouth. He wore an impeccable suit of the finest material.

"Yes. You're safe." I pointed at my ship, my crew and myself. "That gorgon, Medusa, will never catch me and, by extension, you."

He hesitated. "I don't even know you. Why are you helping me?"

I crowed, "Why, lad, we're pirates. We steal treasure."

His eyes went wide.

"We only plunder from the greediest and meanest." I told him. "They're much more intent on keeping their spoils. It's much more exciting that way."

"I'm a werewolf prince, but I'm not treasure." He tipped his head to the side like a confused puppy.

"You're somebody's treasure. Everyone is." I gave him a knowing smile.

"What will you do with me?" he whispered.

I cackled.

His eyes went even wider.

"We'll take you back home, Prince Yardane," I said with a wink. "You're someone else's treasure. Not ours."

With my speedy ship and my capable crew, we landed on the shores of the werewolf kingdom faster than an archer fish can catch a bug.

"Oh, my pup!" The queen, in her perfectly tailored suit, rushed to meet us at the dock. She wrapped her arms around her son, who squeezed her right back.

"Treasure," I mouthed to the young prince.

He grinned at me, showing off all his fangs.

"Thank you, Captain Fiona," the queen gushed. "Whatever can we give you in return?"

I tapped my toe and thought it over. "How about some of your famous candied Fire Flowers?"

In moments, we had crates of the sweets, pallets of beautiful werewolf-made ribbons and a chest of gold going into the hold of the ship.

"Well, if you insist." I rubbed my hands together greedily.

"I do," the queen said, gratitude shining in her eyes.

At a small tug on my sleeve, I looked down at Prince Yardane. He blinked up at me. "Will I ever see you again, Captain?"

"Maybe when you grow up and become a big werewolf, you can join my crew." I patted his head. I looked around to make sure no one was listening. "But, don't tell your mom that I offered to make you a pirate..."

"Aye-aye!" He nodded his head enthusiastically.

As we set sail, the prince waved back at us until we could no longer see him. I stood in the crow's nest and brandished my hat until he vanished over the horizon.

Whistling a short tune, I returned to my regular size and swung back down to the deck. Staying full-sized was exhausting! Standing on the railing, I watched the sun turn the sky the color of peaches and cream. The wind whispered in the sails, the sound of freedom.

"Where to now, Captain?" my first mate, Evergreen, asked as he perched next to me on the railing. He was a forest fairy with green skin and brown hair who loved the freedom of the sea and the sway of a ship under his feet.

"Back to Siorraidh Eilean, I suppose," I groaned.

"Is it Beltane already?" He raised his eyebrows and looked at the position of the sun. "We're going to be late, aren't we?"

"Not at all. We'll be just on time," I said, pulling my hat's brim down over my face.

"On time, as in after everyone's done all the hard work preparing for the festival, you mean?" Evergreen picked up my hat from my head.

"Hey!" I snatched my hat back. "Also, yes. Arr. Pirates don't do festivals, didn't you know? Besides, we're bringing candied Fire Flowers for everyone to eat."

He gave me a skeptical look out of the corner of his eye. "Aren't you excited to go home?"

"I am home," I said, my tone firm. "But, I should pay my respects to the queen and see my family."

"Aren't your parents part of the queen's guard?" Evergreen pressed.

"Yes," I replied with a grimace.

"Didn't they want you to become part of the queen's guard, too?" he inquired.

"Yes." I wrinkled my nose.

"But, you wanted to be a pirate," he concluded.

"Isn't it obvious?" I waved my hands around at the ship. "I don't do well with rules and regulations and all that strict rubbish."

Evergreen laughed. "Well, I'm glad. Captain, you're our treasure, you know that?"

I threw a friendly arm around his shoulders. "And, you're worth your weight in gold, Evergreen, especially when you're full size."

Siorraidh Eilean came into sight as the sun began to set. As we got closer, fires bloomed across the island. Acrid smoke stung my eyes and nose.

"That's not right," I murmured. A small splash and movement in the water caught my attention. A sea serpent.

Several flashes of light illuminated the crow's nest. Windy, a lightning fairy, was using her magic to warn the sea serpent of our approach, so that it could change course.

The creature undulated through the waves. It was so big that it made my frigate look tiny. And, it headed straight for us.

"Don't worry. Sea serpents always move," Evergreen said, his voice tight with worry. He was right. They did. Usually.

Uh oh.

"We're going to crash!" I shouted to my crew. I dug my fingers into the wooden railing. Our ship shattered against the huge sea serpent.

Those of my crew who could leaped and flew through the air at the very last moment. Others plunged into the sea where they

were even more comfortable. Windy lit the ocean with arcs of electricity between her wings. I bobbed in the water, fighting to stay afloat and holding Evergreen in my arms.

Windy reached her hands out to me. I shook my head and pushed Evergreen toward her. Grabbing his hands, Windy hefted him into the air and toward the island. Kicking my feet, I treaded water, making sure all my crew made it to shore.

That was when I saw the sea serpent coming back. This was all a mistake. It had to be. Most sea serpents were kind and friendly. I never let a couple rotten ruffians change my opinion of an entire group. But, this serpent shook its head, disoriented, angry. Its huge maw opened as it headed toward me.

Uh. Oh.

I squeezed my eyes shut. I didn't want to see it coming.

An arm wrapped around me and I started racing through the water. Carefully, I opened one eye. Sparkling blue skin like sun dancing off the sea and wide, worried eyes greeted me. A water fairy!

"Faith!" I burbled out in greeting as we sped through the waves. I coughed as I inhaled water.

The gills along Faith's neck opened and closed. She looked behind us, frowned in concern, and began swimming even faster. I closed my eyes against the rush of water.

As soon as we got to shore, Faith began pounding on my back. I coughed and gurgled and wheezed. "Thank you," I gasped out.

My longtime friend plopped my sopping wet hat back on my head and just stared at the island as it burned. The crackling of flames reached our ears. It smelled like a bonfire that had gone out of control. Faith's shoulders began to tremble.

Slowly, I stood and rested my hand on her shoulder.

"Siorraidh Eilean is no more," Faith said, her voice full of despair. "The Fae have no home." She dropped her face into her hands and sobbed.

I gritted my teeth at her words.

A twig snapped behind us. Spinning around, I cast the spell to make myself full size. I put my hand on my sword and pointed my wings at the intruder.

It was a girl. A human girl. I narrowed my eyes in suspicion. Humans weren't allowed on the island during Beltane.

The girl held her hands up. "We aren't here to hurt you."

And, that was how I met Charli Jade and Colton.