

## FICTION

# THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN

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After being dragged up the stairs by his copper-red hair, Isaac Redwood was thrown into a candle-lit room. Blood pounded in his ears like a racing stagecoach as he eyed an ornate shortsword on the wall. Diverse relics crouched below the windows as the smell of tobacco lingered.

Isaac had snuck aboard the ship to get one thing: the diary of his late wife. He desired it for the wealth of memories it held, the last tie to Josephine since her death at the age of thirty-two. Isaac was innocent in her passing, caused by sudden heart failure, but one primary figure was skeptical over it all.

"You filthy *snake!*" Captain Morae stated. He stormed into his cabin, locking the door to turn in one swift motion. His brow slowly lowered, enhancing a sharp expression that carried through to his large brown beard.

Isaac scrambled to his feet. Morae stood nearly a head over Isaac, his canted black hat enhancing his presence.

"I-I didn't kill her!" Isaac explained. "Josephine was my wife— I loved her! You're mistak-

"Don't try and rationalize things," Morae said. "You've had your twisted fun... Now it's *my* turn."

The captain hustled on hard heels. Isaac leapt for the shortsword, but was violently yanked away by his dark blue coat.

"Murderer!" exclaimed the pirate. He spun his opponent off balance, hurling him towards a circular table in the middle of the room. Candles and various relics jostled from the sudden impact of Isaac's ribs.

Isaac took sharp breaths as his mind caught up to what had happened, then it began to scatter. He braced himself against the table with wobbly knees, trying his best to ignore what would likely result in a large bruise. He slowly stood.

"Bold of you to hide aboard my ship," the captain said. "But *stupid* to face me alone."

Morae's umber eyes ignited with a fire that could only be described as a growing rage. The pirate slowly walked forward; the hilt of his large cutlass glimmered against his hip. Isaac knew he couldn't prove his innocence to that man, so he had to rethink his strategy.

"Betrayal is the worst kind of hurt, Redwood," the captain stated. "To trust in what you thought was secure to only be stripped of that reality in a single action. No amount of time, no sincere apology can truly repair the irreversible hole that was caused... Imagine how she felt."

Isaac drew a blank of what to say as his neck went ice cold. His muscles had seized. Captain Morae stopped before Isaac, his breath violent.

"You mess with *my* daughter, you answer to me."

Morae lifted Isaac by the collar and slammed him onto the cluttered tabletop. If not for the giant staring through his soul, Isaac might've felt the agonizing pains in his back. He blindly grabbed for anything useful—he had no hope of wrestling himself free. His mind scattered further. It took everything Isaac had in that moment not to truly panic, for he was no killer.

"Look at me," Morae said. "Look me in the eye, lad! No man alive can hurt my family and get away with it. Have you ever felt consequence before? This will dwarf anything you've ever experienced."

Morae proceeded to punch Isaac several times, his large fist clad with many silver rings. Isaac had no chance of blocking such a force and could only hope his nose would stay intact. After six or seven punches Morae spoke again, but Isaac couldn't make out the words. He helplessly tried to grab something off the table, and his fingers blindly curled around an object. Swinging as hard as he could, Isaac cracked his makeshift bat against Captain Morae's skull, glass and alcohol dripping violently to the floor. He released Isaac and stumbled back in a daze.

Through the tearful blurriness of his eyes, Isaac could see the outline of his opponent clutching his face. He blinked hard, sliding off the table with a thump and wearily getting to his feet. Head throbbing, Isaac aimed for the wooden desk that sat before glass doors at the back of the cabin. His hearing became restored only to catch the last of Morae's agony that spilled into the room.

Isaac stumbled around the rightmost side of the desk just as his mind began to level. His steel gray eyes soon focused upon an ivory flintlock pistol. He blinked hard and snatched it up. It seemed to be custom-made for Morae's hand size and his own felt childishly small. Was the thing loaded?

"Redwood!" yelled Captain Morae. The glass bottle had breached his forehead and sent blood to intermingle with his brown facial hair.

Isaac snapped the flint hammer back, bracing the gun with shaking hands. "Stay back!" A surge of confidence erupted. "No further!"

Both men took a moment filled with sharp, trembling breaths; their mental shells of confidence hacked open by the other. The chandelier made from a ship's wheel swung rhythmically above the round table its candles danced in a loud silence. The smell of anxious perspiration oozed into the room. The ship's wooden hull shifted below. "Put it down, lad," Morae said calmly.

"No," Isaac replied. "I-I need her book first."

Captain Morae stood motionless across the round table.

"I *will* shoot," Isaac bluffed.

"I know you will, killer."

"Put it on the far side of the desk."

Morae reached into his black coat's inner pocket. He kept a good distance from Isaac and slowly walked to the opposite length of his desk. Isaac adjusted to face Morae front-on, his arms aching from the weight of the gun and dying adrenaline.

The slam of a leather journal punctuated the silence, trapped under Morae's large hand. "You have nowhere to run," announced the pirate.

Isaac swallowed a gob of spit. His only option of escape was the island the ship was anchored off of. The ocean stood between them, but Isaac was a confident swimmer and had connections at the local marina. He kept a still expression.

“Your spirit is admirable... even for a murderer,” Morae said.

Isaac wanted to say something, but he knew it would do no good. He stood breathing as he observed the captain and the shell of a man he’d become. Morae was once an admiral in the King’s Navy before his passion for pirate hunting led his morals over the line of law.

After many breaths, Isaac spoke. “Pass it over.”

Morae stood still. Following a pause, he slid the diary across the bare desktop, stopping under Isaac’s fingers. He slipped it into his inner chest pocket, returning his hand to brace the gun. Isaac finally had what he came for.

“Where to now?” Morae asked. “The crow’s nest? The sea? An empty barrel?” The pirate chuckled. “It matters not. Wherever you end up, her book won’t be safe until it’s back with me.”

“Josephine *trusted* it to me,” Isaac responded. “I wasn’t out plundering the seas for my ego’s sake! I was *present* in the last decade of her life!”

Morae’s expression fell into a stern place as his shadow grew in scale. Isaac’s hair stood on end as his spine slithered. A crushing feeling advanced deep in his chest which entirely broke his confidence along with his eye contact.

Morae remained still, eyes black. The ocean swayed the ship more than before, the hull’s imperfections ached in protest.

“You think I *chose* this?” The captain mocked. “You think I elected immense riches, troops, and the life of an outlaw over a *family*? Over my wife and daughter? The *life* we built?”

Isaac’s arms trembled from fear and the weight of the gun. He completely froze up. The air grew incredibly thin. The taste of rich blood continued down Isaac’s tight esophagus. He swore that the candles above made a meek hissing sound. He could hear his enemy breathe. Maybe even Morae’s heartbeat.

Without breaking eye contact, Captain Morae rested his hand on his cutlass, slowly clicking back the flint hammer on his modified weapon. Isaac watched as a bit of yellow syrup oozed out from the top of the sheath.

“You know nothing of me, lad,” Morae said softly.

With a flash of fury, his cutlass screamed out from his hip. The flint hammer cracked forward to consume the blade in a hot fire, smoke pouring into the cabin air. Isaac finally squeezed the trigger of the flintlock. After a spark ensued, it was clear the gun wasn’t loaded. Isaac erupted through the thick glass doors, stumbling onto the balcony. Captain Morae wasted no time in his pursuit, flaming sword crackling as it parted the black air around him.

Regardless of the chop of the water and the dead of night, Isaac knew a cold swim was better than being slain by Josephine’s vengeful father. He leapt from the balcony without breaking pace, sailing past the moonlight to be engulfed in a barrage of bubbles. With memories of his wife, Isaac Redwood escaped towards the island.