

Skirophorian

There are three rules the captain follows when she's engaged in battle. The first is to never run away; running away confirms her weakness and pirates are never weak. The second is to always keep her eyes on her enemy and never look away. The third, which in any other case would've been first, is to never under any circumstance reveal your name.

The captain's feet stepped softly over the hot dirt ground. Her toes, covered in dry dust, continued following the path laid in front of her. She kept her head low, her cloak covering her head as much as it could. A black triangle marked her arm, representing her alliance with the sea and the lifestyle of piracy. Because of this, she kept her arms covered underneath her cloak. If she was questioned, which she assumed she would be, she'd fake being from a country other than Greece. Crease her eyebrows in confusion as if to say, *"I'm sorry, but I do not speak your language."* Being caught in the streets as a pirate, much less a female pirate, meant death.

She stopped at a wooden trading table. She knew she had a few minutes to scan the table and see what she could take back to her ship. The merchant, wearing a stale expression, noticed how the person in front of him eyed the abundance of olive oil and wine that filled the table. The captain knew how much they'd sell overseas. Taking an even bigger risk of getting caught, she stepped closer to the table.

Without uttering a word, she made sure the merchant was making eye contact with her before she looked intently at the olive oil and wine, then back at him.

"How many of each?" was all he asked as he looked at the captain. She shook around her bag of drachma. The merchant's nose flared as he looked down at the person before him. "Can you not speak?"

The captain shook her covered head slowly, hoping that the merchant would catch on and realize that she was not from the city of Athens. Unfortunately, she had approached a merchant that lacked any amount of patience.

“Then how did you expect us to make a trade?” His tone matched his expression, but it sounded much harsher on the captain’s ears than she expected. If she valued her feelings, she’d feel hurt. But this was the life of a pirate. Involvement in this life meant accepting any harsh outcome that might come your way.

The captain shook her bag of drachma once more. This time, the coins shook so hard that the sounds seemed to seep into the atmosphere, and float away with the hot breeze. She looked far above the merchant, staring at the top of the awning above them. A shadow quickly passed over the awning, and with that, she nodded. The merchant would have appeared more confused if it were possible. Feeling the immense wave of suspicion pass between the two, the merchant reached out to grab the captain’s cloak. In seconds, his arm dropped and his body fell limp against the back wall, away from the table.

The captain took the hood off of her head, feeling a little cooler than before. As she removed the rest of the cloak, leaving her in a chiton and himation, she went over to the merchant’s body, seeing an arrowhead sticking out where his heart was. She looked above, noticing the shadow from before, which had come from her crewmate, Dion. The other crewmate who threw the arrowhead, Elias, was on the opposite side. They jumped down from above as the captain dropped the small bag of drachma on the ground. Before the captain had the chance to react accordingly, another trader from the other side came running up, looking between the three pirates and the bleeding body of the dead merchant.

“The Braveheart Pirates! Alert King Minos! They’re here!” The trader called the attention of everyone else while drawing his sword, one that seemed to belong to another Braveheart pirate due to the black triangle at the grip. The captain smirked while drawing her own sword, showing the Braveheart triangle mark on her arm to the trader.

“Well, it seems that the King sold *our* sword to the wrong person,” her mocking tone caused her other two crewmates to laugh. “We might have to get it back, don’t you think?” The captain’s eyes never left the trader before her. *Rule number two.*

Fear crossed the trader’s face before he masked the emotion. The captain, having held the trader's gaze, noticed the fear that never really dissipated from his eyes. While waiting for the trader to strike, Dion and Elias drew their swords; two that looked almost identical to the one the trader held.

“Back away, Bravehearts! Or I will bring you to the King, himself!” The trader attempted to keep up his tough tone, but it was difficult when three pirates with the reputation of murder stood right in front of you.

“Your old King? Please. It would take him ten sunsets to even get up from his chambers!” Dion laughed loudly, almost falling over while Elias snickered.

The trader, offended at the pirate’s remark, took a step forward with his sword pointing directly at the captain. She didn’t move an inch. Instead, her eyes shifted between the trader’s feet, then up to his hands. His grip on the sword was wobbly, but he attempted to make it appear confident. It was evident in his stance that he didn’t want to be scared in the presence of skilled pirates. With another quick glance to the trader’s feet, the captain grinned.

“I bet a whole bag of drachma that it’ll be left,” she said to her crewmates.

“Left? I bet right. The left looks weak,” Dion scoffed.

“Elias? Left or right?” the captain called. While the two awaited Elias’ answer, the trader narrowed his eyes on the captain.

“You pirates with your silly games. Since the sea is your beloved, I’ll send you straight to her!” The trader went straight towards the captain, taking off with his left foot first.

“Aha! Told ya’ it’ll be left!” the captain smiled as she dodged the trader’s first attack. His sword had barely grazed her right arm, so the attack left the captain unfazed. The trader, now more fearful than before, waited until the captain lunged towards him with her sword. He made a weak attempt at countering her attack, but his grip was flimsy with nervousness. The trader’s sword flew up into the air due to the force of the captain’s attack. Elias, who had been to the left of the captain, ran straight after the sword, and grabbed it before it hit the ground.

“Weak swordsmanship, sir,” the captain taunted, walking closer to the trader with her sword pointed directly at him. She went to slash his legs, making the trader fall on his back. As he was down, the captain wasted no time to pierce the trader’s chest with her sword. To her, the trader wasn’t much of an opponent, much less an actual enemy. Only one with skill was able to engage in true battle with her. Mediocre traders and merchants never stood a chance.

As the captain reached into the trader’s pockets and grabbed his bag of drachma, she began to hear faint footsteps far behind, which grew louder as they approached the trading street. Then she heard yells. Screams from people telling her, “*stop this madness! Leave our people and merchandise alone! Have you no mercy?*” If she cared, which she didn’t, she would’ve turned around and ran away. But rule number one watched her every move with dark eyes. *Pirates are never weak.* The captain rose to her feet, pulling her sword from the trader’s body and smiled.

“Looks like we have some fans,” she looked at Elias, then at Dion. Elias slid the trader’s sword into the socket, keeping his own sword in his hand, ready to face off the common people

that wanted to sever their heads. Dion, also smiling with the captain, did the same as Elias, and held his sword tightly in his hand.

In no less than five seconds, the common people seemed to collectively run towards the three pirates with their weapons. Elias and Dion attacked them head on, slashing their necks and arms while taking their bags of drachma if they could. The ones they had no time to reach fell to the ground. The captain, concerned with a different task, looked above her, grabbed onto one of the awnings, and pulled herself up. Above, she was able to see the other trading tables that still had collections of wine and olive oil. Making sure her crewmates were fine on their own, the captain jumped down from the awning and made her own path through the sea of angry common people. Bodies dropped in unison as she used her sword like a magician's wand, willing the power in her hands to bring the people down.

As she did so, Dion and Elias looked up and noticed that the group of common people had diminished severely. Aside from the bodies, only swords and loose drachma were left on the ground. Either the people had been killed by Elias and Dion, or they had been killed by the captain herself. While the two pirates looked ahead of them, they heard the waves from the sea begin to crash into each other. Their time in Athens was winding down by the second.

“Elias! Dion! Load the ship! I'll be aboard in 30 seconds!” the captain said as she grabbed all the olive oil and wine she could with her arms. She had slid her sword into the socket a moment before, after defeating the last common person that was in her way. As she ran towards the border of the sea, she felt sharp pains begin to shoot up her feet, indicating that they were cut somehow, probably from the fallen weapons on the ground. Small trails of blood followed her steps as she loaded the ship with her crewmates and set sail towards the vast sea.

“Twenty full bags of drachma, two whole gallons of oil, and three liters of wine. I’d say we did a phenomenal job,” Dion propped his feet up. They all sat around a long table in the captain’s cabin of the ship, sailing peacefully on the sea far away from the city of Athens.

“Of course, but at what cost?” the captain rolled her eyes. Dusk was approaching, and she had spent hours trying to stitch up the open wounds on her feet since departing from Athens.

No one responded to the captain. It was best to leave her at rest. Instead, Dion picked up a bag of drachma that he did not go through before, and emptied it out on the table. Along with the clanking sounds of the coins came a small, but folded piece of papyrus. Elias furrowed his brows as he reached out to grab the small piece.

“To the captain of the trireme named Dahlia. Cap’n, It’s for you,” Elias placed the papyrus piece on the table and slid it towards the captain.

She looked at the papyrus for a moment before picking it up and carefully opening it. It turned out to be a bigger piece than she expected, and it was full of neat writing. She looked up at her crewmates before her, then cleared her throat.

*“The sea is calm tonight.
Not tainted with the enemy’s blood
Or bottled up with resentful screams.
The waves welcome us tonight.
The sea embraces Dahlia with a warm hug,
Tightly holding her in their arms
And away from the ones who might love to see us fall
Into the depths of the ocean.
Tonight, we make the sea our home.”*

- *Zahra Rose, Skirophoria*¹

The captain's face remained still. If she wasn't the captain of a pirate crew, her heart would have begun racing. She would have broken out in a sweat at finding her poem stuffed inside a bag of drachma. Instead, she met the eyes of her crewmates. They heard it too; the captain's name was written clearly on the page. Her third rule had been broken, but not on purpose. She knew that was her poem, but it was rewritten. And even still, how did it leave Dahlia?

Instead of saying anything else, the captain turned the papyrus around, looking around for another message. She found it on the top left corner of the page.

And to think you valued your name. You've been found, Braveheart.

- *Signed, King Minos.*

The captain rose to her feet, ignoring the small pains that went up her heels towards her ankles. She then went over to a corner in the cabin and began rummaging through the stolen bags of gems that laid idly against the wall. She was looking aggressively for a small stack of papyrus that was bound by the plant's natural glue. When the captain couldn't find it, she turned to her crew. "Where's the rest of my stack?"

"As if we'd know," Dion scoffed. The captain walked back to the table and reached over, punching Dion in his jaw. The crewmate fell out of his chair, hitting his back against the floorboard of the cabin. The captain went to where he was and reached down, grabbing Dion's chiton tightly in her fist.

"Minos could be waiting at the shore for us, ready to attack at any moment. Sure, he knew of this ship, everyone knows of The Braveheart Dahlia. But a single name to match a face?"

¹ Skirophoria(alt. Skirophorion)- month of the final harvest of the grain. Equivalates to present-day June-July.

That's death, guaranteed. What makes you think he doesn't have your name on hand at this very second?" the captain spoke calmly despite her grip on Dion's chiton. The crewmate sighed, but kept quiet. The captain released her grip and stepped away.

"Elias, go be on the lookout, and the rest of you switch with each other throughout the night. We cannot let our guards down," she spoke, and watched as her crew rushed out of the cabin. "Dion, find my stack."

The captain walked out of the cabin and up the ladder towards the deck of the ship. She looked towards the sea, letting out a nervous breath. Last time she had her stack of papyrus, she was in Athens on one of her many raids there. *But it couldn't have fallen out...could it?* The Braveheart shook with a nervous chill that she wasn't accustomed to. If the king had her name, then she would be easier to capture. It was her fault, and there was nothing she could do about it. *Rule number three had been broken.*

Captain Zahra had heard stories of King Minos. Tales from ancient pirates about an old king who reigned with an iron fist and brass knuckles. When he spoke, his words spewed through his lips and melted everything in his path like hot magma. He tolerated no harm done to his merchandise, or his land, or his people. He arose each day with an urge to annihilate every living and breathing pirate that dared to harm what belonged to him. He found the audacity pirates held to be disrespectful, and what kind of king would he have been if he had let his reign be treated poorly?

Instead of treading in fear of Minos, Zahra grew curious. Crete was where his main palace was. *The bigger the palace, the bigger the treasure.* Zahra wondered about the many chambers filled to the brim with jewels and gems. The abundance of merchandise that she could keep as fortune for her crew. Those same items that Minos allowed to be sold on the streets of Crete. The captain's hunger for treasure that did not belong to her grew as Dahlia sailed across the sea towards Crete.