

***Pirati and Poetry***

by

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## Introduction

This senior project consists of both a collection of poetry and the first part of a novella titled "*Pirati*." There was a lot of difficulty in figuring out how to combine both aspects of writing that I have come to love over my time here at purchase. All I knew for certain going in to this project was that I wanted to have both fiction and poetry in it, and after consideration I realized the poetry and fiction do not have to flow together perfectly. If my writing is meant to represent who I am, it makes sense for some of it to seem unrelated to other parts of it.

Many of the struggles I have had in working on this project have been problems I have always had to grapple with as a writer. For as long as I can remember, I have struggled to complete even a single story. I get easily distracted from a project I am working on, and I constantly find myself jumping from idea to idea. I also frequently will go through periods of having multiple unfinished works available to work on, but none of them are things I am motivated to continue writing. Self-motivation is the main problem in these scenarios. Writing only ever came easily to me when I was avoiding doing other work, or if I had a rigid deadline set by someone other than me that was fast approaching. While I have gotten better at writing farther away from a deadline, I still struggle to write if there are no immediate consequences for not finishing by a certain time. Considering how much I have improved my ability to write outside of high pressure environments over the past couple years, however, I am certain that sometime soon this will be a much smaller hurdle to get over when I want to put a story out into the world. In working on this senior project I have already improved in this area. While there were times that I struggled to get what I wanted done my initial intended dates, I have gotten to a point where I only need one or two more days to get myself working.

My writing style overall is most strongly influenced by two bodies of work that I consumed in middle school and early high school, the book series *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* by Rick Riordan, and the webcomic *Homestuck* by Andrew Hussie. The main way in which both of them have influenced me in terms of the fiction I write is how the narration of most of my stories is very casual, almost like the narrator is just a person talking. This casualness can also be seen in some of my poetry that is in this collection, such as the one titled, “An excessive joint movement in which the angle formed by the bones of a particular joint is straightened beyond its normal range of motion.” Both of these influences also fostered my interest in stories of adventure and stories where the characters are the strongest part of the narrative. *Homestuck* in particular also taught me how to handle writing in the second person, which is now one of my favorite methods of writing. This more so affects my poetry than fiction, and can be seen in a few poems in this collection, including “Advice,” though I do make some use of the second person in sections of *Pirati*.

“Advice” also shows my influence from the *Percy Jackson* series in a more literal way, as it is a found poem made up of words found within a chapter from the first book in the series. Found poetry, especially in the format I prefer to write them, helps push me to use vocabulary I otherwise would be unlikely to ever use. This format is where I copy all of the words of a section of text, usually from a book, and input them into a word cloud generator. This leaves me with the words jumbled up in a way that makes it harder to connect it with the original text, and therefore gives me the freedom to arrange those same words however I please. I tend to create these found poems from media that I consumed in my childhood, including the aforementioned Percy Jackson series, as well as Pokémon and other games and books.

While some of my poems are inspired by my childhood, most of them come from a different source. A large group of my poems are centered around a theme of issues with specific body parts. The aforementioned “An excessive joint movement in which the angle formed by the bones of a particular joint is straightened beyond its normal range of motion,” as well as “Can I please get a heat pack?” take this more literally, discussing physical pain my elbow and back respectively give me, and how that pain affects my life in other ways. Other poems, such as the six “Folding Hearts” poems discuss more of an emotional “heart” than a literal one, but I would still consider that to be a part of my body.

*Pirati* as a story initially started as a much larger story that I attempted to write in my freshman year of high school. I have always loved pirate stories, and I also had an appreciation for “Romeo & Juliet” stories, ones where two people who care deeply for one another are on opposing sides that would do everything to keep them apart. The basic premise of *Pirati* is still the same as that original version: a brother and sister are both captains of their own ships, with the brother being the law abiding privateer and the sister being the rule breaking pirate. The original story was meant to be more of an exploration of writing characters from another story I had already started, while *Pirati* has entirely new characters. There is also more of a set plot to *Pirati*, whereas the original story I had no ideas as to where it was going. This time, the two encounter each other when they engage in a battle at sea. Upon realizing the other is on the opposing ship, the two captains guide their crews out of battle, all while putting on a show of vowing to beat their “enemy” the next time they met. Neither recognizes that the other is only acting, however, and thus they must figure out a way to reunite with their sibling in a way that won’t get themselves or their crew members killed.

Part of my original goal with the story was to write an emotionally compelling story without romance, as I struggled to find books that did not even contain a romantic subplot. That goal in regards to *Pirati* has not changed, and I hope to have written a story that is satisfactorily romance-free to younger me. People often tell me that they think the concept a story with absolutely no romance is difficult to imagine writing, but personally I have always found it difficult to write it at all. For me, it has always been difficult to imagine writing a story with romance, and that disconnect from the typical thoughts on this topic have only motivated me more to write the story I want to see in the world. I hope that in fleshing out this piece for my senior project, I have started to create a story that will make my fourteen-year-old self proud.

My writing has always been a way for me to reach out to the world to find people like me. I started writing because I couldn't find media that reflected my own experiences and feelings, and while there is more stuff out there that I can relate to, I know that there can always be more. My poetry and my fiction writing further this goal together by covering aspects of myself that I hope to find other people that can relate to them. I write about the complicated relationship I have with my body and the capacity for human connection outside of romance, and in these works I see what I would have loved to have before I realized I needed to write it myself.

## Pirati

*Captain's Log: May 16<sup>th</sup>, 17— A.D. Four Days Past Sixth Leave of Port*

*Unfortunately, I still have not overcome this bout of seasickness. I know that it is normal for me to feel this way every time we leave port, but I don't think that means I'm not allowed to be irritated by it. It should only be a few days until this nausea leaves me, but for now Quartermaster Daniel is forcing me to rest in my cabin. I trust him well enough to take care of things while I am incapacitated, but I do still worry. These first few days leaving port are usually the most dangerous.*

Clio puts down her pen and sighs. She leans back in her chair until her head is nearly upside-down. “Ugh this is so boring! I have shit to do!” She sits up quickly and slams her fist down on the table in frustration. She regrets it immediately as she is overcome with another wave of nausea from the quick movement. A few quick taps vibrate through the door to the cabin.

“Captain, are you doing alright?” The voice that follows the knocks sounds both concerned and amused.

“Leave me alone, Dan!” She tries to sound angry, but it comes out a little wobbly as she fights the urge to lose her lunch.

*Captain's Log: May 17<sup>th</sup>, 17— A.D. Five Days Past Sixth Leave of Port*

*I've felt a little better today— well enough to walk through our lowest deck and inspect what we've got and how long it will last us. According to crewman Grady's logs, we should have*

*eight crates worth of beans, sea biscuits, and jerky. We should have enough to last us for the next month, maybe more. Hopefully, if any rats managed to sneak on board we can find and dispose of them early.*

“Oh shit!” The shout comes from Alan, one of the newer members of the crew. Clio glances over to see where he is and spots the top of his head peeking up from behind some of the crates.

“Alan,” she calls, “what’s going on?”

“Nothing Captain! Just startled by a rat, that’s all!”

Clio sighs. “Did you at least kill it?”

Alan stands, once again visible from the waist up. “No, Captain. I apologize.” He bows his head in apology, only for Clio to rap her knuckles on the wooden crate in front of him.

“Stop apologizing and do something about it. Check the crates for holes, and once you’re done with that, hunt down the vermin. Where there’s one, there’s more, so make sure you find them all. I don’t want to lose any more rations than we probably already have.”

He jerks up, spine straight. “Yes, Captain! I’ll be right on it!”

*Captain’s Log: May 18<sup>th</sup>, 17— A.D. Six Days Past Sixth Leave of Port*

*The seasickness may have finally left me, but I still cannot enjoy the view from the top deck: a great fog has rolled in, and it is difficult to see more than a few feet in front of my face. I’ve ordered three of the general crew members to take shifts in the crow’s nest to watch out for other ships. It’ll be hard to avoid an ambush, but I will do my best to keep my crew and ship safe.*



The deck is slick with condensation and the air is thick with the heavy fog. There's a thud, and Clio turns to see one of the younger crew members, Vincenza, face down on the floor. They weakly call, "I'm okay!" and carry on with their duties. As the sun begins to set, a small boy climbs down from the crow's nest to hand off the telescope to another man. Clio turns back to the ship's railing, attempting to scan the horizon once more. She squints, trying to focus on a point to the west.

"I need a second pair of eyes!" she calls to whoever else is on deck. Orsino, the cook, ambles his way over. "Is there something over that way or am I just seeing things," Clio asks him,

He leans forward, bracing both hands on the railing to keep himself from falling off. After a moment he grunts and shakes his head. Clio sighs, but thanks him and sends him on his way. She looks again, still not sure. Eventually her attention is drawn away by other matters and she decides to leave the looking solely up to those in the crow's nest.

*Captain's Log: May 19<sup>th</sup>, 17— A.D. Seven Days Past Sixth Leave of Port*

*Today is his birthday, as well as the anniversary of the day he left home. I still remember it so clearly. Mother had taken me out into town the day before to pick out something sweet from the baker's shop to give my brother as a gift. I picked a small pastry I remembered seeing him eyeing a few months back. I was jealous, as I was every year, because the baker always closed his shop the week of my birthday because of the holidays, and I wanted something sweet as well. When we woke the next morning, I didn't even get to give him my gift. He was already gone. All he had left was a note on his bed, but mother wouldn't tell me what it said. At first, I was just mad that he would skip out on the one day a year he was given the family's full attention. But*

*when he didn't come back after a few days, I was even more furious. He had always told me he longed for adventure, but he also promised that when he went on an adventure, he'd always take me with him. And he did take me on journeys into odd parts of town, or through the local lord's vineyards. But on this, his biggest adventure, he left me behind. I guess that's why I became what I am today. It's an attempt to have a bigger adventure than he ever could.*

*Captain's Log: May 20<sup>th</sup>, 17— A.D. Eight Days Past Sixth Leave of Port*

*I saw a ship on the horizon again. They probably also can't see us through this damn fog, so we shouldn't be crossing paths any time soon. I tried using our old and rusty looking glass to get a better look at what we were dealing with, but I couldn't make much out, just that it's a bigger ship than ours. Just as an extra precaution, we will change the ship's direction. Hopefully, the weather will clear up in a few days and it will be smooth sailing for a little longer. Maybe we could even loop back around and take whatever that distant ship's got.*

*Captain's Log: May 21<sup>st</sup>, 17— A.D. Nine Days Past Sixth Leave of Port*

*The fog still has not cleared. Twice more I have seen a shadow in the distance. We've changed course a few times over the past couple of days, but we can't seem to shake them. I would like to hope it is merely a small merchant or travel ship, but I am having my men prepare for the worst. In any moment of free time, people are sharpening swords and cleaning guns. Even the musicians have been given time off from their playing so that they can also prepare for a potential fight. I've started spending as much time as I can out of my cabin. If something happens, I want to be right there with my crew. Tensions are obviously rising, but I am still hoping this fog will pass safely.*

Clio and Daniel sit side by side, sharpening their swords up on the still damp deck. Next to each other like this, it is evident how much smaller the quartermaster is compared to the captain. He rests his head easily against her shoulder in a rare moment of relaxation. They chat idly for a while, gently teasing as old friends tend to do. In the middle of sharing a story from his time on land when they were last in port, Daniel suddenly bolts upright. “Captain, look!”

The ship that had been tailing them is quickly approaching, the bowsprit cutting through the thick fog. The two scramble up and start shouting for crew to prepare. Clio knows they don’t have a lot of time to prepare. She barks some orders for the gunmen to line up along the side of the ship. “The moment you think you can hit something, shoot, understand?”

After hearing various shouts of “Yes Captain!” Clio heads for the wheel. She plans on doing her best to prevent a collision, since the other ship keeps barreling forward with no signs of stopping. Before she can get there, however, she’s stopped by one of the navigators. “Captain!”

“Yes, Grady? I am in a bit of a rush and would like to get us headed in a direction that is not a direct collision course with that other ship.” She shifts her weight from foot to foot, feeling antsy.

“Sorry Captain, but they’re requesting your help closer to the quarter deck. They’re having difficulty wheeling out the cannon.”

“Fantastic! Just what we needed. Grady, you head to the wheel then, get us in the right direction, and I’ll go deal with the cannon.” They stare at each other for a moment until Clio cocks her head and gestures for him to get a move on. He nods and runs off in the direction Clio was originally headed.

Changing her direction, Clio sprints toward where the cannon is usually kept. Unfortunately, their ship was too small to warrant keeping multiple cannons, though usually it wasn't much of a problem. After all, no one wants to sink a ship that they're planning on looting. But in cases such as these, where lives are on the line, Clio tends to start weighing the pros and cons of investing in a larger ship again.

Sure enough, the old, rusted cannon hasn't been moved much farther from its usual storage space. Enzo and Adone are pushing with all their might, trying to move the cannon even an inch, sweat pouring down their faces from the effort. Without a word, Clio grabs the rope wrapped around the front of the cannon and pulls with all her might, and the three of them together manage to get it moving. By the time they maneuver it to where it points at the enemy, the ship is close enough to see its flag. Clio and the two boys curse simultaneously at the sight of the French flag. She looks up to her left and sees Daniel up on the quarterdeck, preparing a small squad of men to act as the front lines if the other ship's crew attempts a boarding.

Within moments, the other ship is side by side with hers, and Clio listens with dread and rage as the other captain shouts across the water, "By this Letter of Marque provided to me by the King of France, we will board your ship and confiscate all valuables. Do not resist or you will be considered enemies of the country!"

The two boys at the cannon seem eager to start shooting, but Clio holds a hand out, telling them to hold fire. "They've got at least six cannons pointed at us right now. If we fire, they'll surely retaliate. We'll have to be careful about this. Wait until my signal."

Up on the quarterdeck, the enemy ship has made a bridge out of a plank of wood across and begins attempting to board. Daniel stands near where it has landed, trying to move it but it

seems to be just a bit too heavy. The enemy quartermaster starts making his way across, his men following close behind. Daniel readies his sword, calling for his men to prepare themselves as well.

The second the enemy crew sets foot on Clio's ship, all hell breaks loose. Within minutes, they've swarmed onto the main deck. The sounds of metal hitting metal and gunshots fill the air as the pirate crew fights for their lives. Clio is in the mix alongside her crew, slicing down as many privateers as she can manage. It is in this chaos and carnage that she hears a somewhat familiar voice call her name from behind her. "Clio?"

She turns around and is met with the captain of the privateer ship himself. She levels a glare towards him, hoping to hide her confusion at how familiar he seems. He swaggers toward her, and with his cocky attitude and his knowledge of her name, it doesn't take much for Clio to realize why she recognized him.

"Ew, gross, you grew a beard? Clemente, you have to get rid of it." As she says this, she swings her sword towards his face. He leans away to avoid it and nearly stumbles over his own feet.

"Clio, come now, is that any way to greet your dear older brother?" He swings quickly back at her, but she parries it, locking their swords together. They both grunt as they attempt to overcome the other.

"It is when he's attacking my ship!" She kicks a leg out in an attempt to knock him off balance. He throws himself back, nearly landing on top of another fighting pair. Clemente rushes at Clio once more, and the resulting *CLANG* of their swords rings louder than any of the surrounding fighting.

“Ah, so it’s yours? Quite beautiful, I must say. Shame it’s so, er, small,” Clement mocks.

“If it’s so small, why even bother taking it?” she growls, swinging her sword up and slicing a bit of hair off of Clemente’s cheek. He winces and decides the best retaliation is to knock the hat off of Clio’s head. She grabs it from the air with her left hand, then lunges at him once more.

“Well, my King can use as whatever riches we can bring him, however small. Besides, who am I to pass up the opportunity for ambush that the fog bestowed upon me?”

“Your king? You’re not even French, you’re Italian,” Clio scoffs. She leaps out of the way of three quick slashes of Clemente’s sword.

“Shhh my crew doesn’t know that, and I don’t plan on letting them know any time soon so it would be appreciated if you kept your voice down!” He genuinely looks a little panicked, and Clio realizes she’s found a weak point. If there’s a crack in his command of his crew, Clio is determined to wedge her sword in and break it.

“Does your crew also know that you may be operating under an expired letter of marque?” She has to hope that he hasn’t heard the news yet, but from his reaction it seems that she is right in her assumption.

“No, they— wait hold on. What? It was signed only six months ago, plenty of time before it no longer holds power.” He falters, and Clio takes the opportunity to get a stab in, grazing his side. He swipes back, and she can’t move fast enough to avoid it.

Clio shakes her head as blood starts to seep through the fabric of her shirt sleeve. “I don’t know that that holds up if the King is no longer in power.” She smirks, knowing that she has him exactly where she wants him.

“Of course the King is in power, he was in perfect health when we were last in port!” He panics, attacking wildly.

Clio easily stays clear of the sharp point, and nearly laughs as she gives a final verbal prod. “Which was in...?” She begins to advance with her sword pointed straight at his face.

“April, not long ago at all!” Clemente backs up, feebly attempting to push her sword away with his own. It’s no use. Her arm stays strong, and eventually he finds himself against the railing of the ship.

“Clemente, we were in port only a week ago and according to my sources, France’s leadership has changed. It may be sudden, but I know it is true. And without a valid letter of marque, you’re no different than me and my crew.” Clio smirks, continuing her advance,

He swallows nervously. “No, it can’t be! There’s no way things have changed so much in only a month—”

“Do you want to risk it though?” She holds the tip of the sword less than an inch from his throat.

Clemente scowls. One of his men runs up to them then, ducking and weaving between the clashing swords and fists that are still flying all around the two captains. The lower-ranking privateer swings his sword in protection of his captain, knocking Clio’s sword away from Clemente’s throat. This catches her off guard, and she stumbles back from her brother and his

subordinate. “Captain Clément! We can’t hold our ground much longer. Quartermaster Antoine wants us to retreat!”

Clio gives her brother a bewildered look. “Clément?”

“Yes, that is my name!” He grins, but his eyes attempt to convey to Clio that this is not the time. He then turns to the crew member who is glancing nervously between the two captains. “Fine, if Antoine believes it best, we shall retreat.” He readjusts his grip on his sword, readying to lead his men to safety. Clemente fixes Clio with a hard stare, challenging her.

She looks around at her crew. Many of them seem beaten and battered, and more than a few are laying down on the deck, blood pooling around them. “Fine, I’ll let you go. Keeps me from losing too many crew members this soon after leaving port anyway.” She sheathes her sword with a scowl as Clemente shouts to his crew to retreat.

Most of the fighting dies down as the privateers make their escape, but a few continue fighting. Clio assists her crew in defending themselves, and eventually the only privateers left on the pirate ship are dead ones. From across the water, as the privateer ship begins to pull up anchor, Clemente calls out, “Mark my words, Captain Clio— I’ll track you down and I’ll commandeer your ship!”

Clio grins and shouts back, “You can try, but you’ll never catch us, Captain *Clément!*” She makes sure her tone is clearly mocking. She feels a hand on her shoulder and turns to see Daniel.

“You sure we should just be letting them go like this? They did kill quite a few of our men.”



Clio breaks eye contact with Daniel and focused on the retreating ship. “We’ll get our chance for revenge, I’m sure. For now, let them lick their wounds.”

*Captain’s Log: May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 17— A.D. Ten Days Past Sixth Leave of Port*

*We lost ten good men in that fight yesterday. Quartermaster Daniel offered to gather their hammocks and prepare the funeral shrouds in my stead, for which I am grateful. I consider myself lucky that most of the people on this ship have no family to be told of loved ones’ deaths. Though they have no one to remember their names, the least I can do is remember them in place of their family. I refuse to forget them, for both their value as members of my crew and their value as humans. Eliodoro, Abramo, Vanni, Ferruccio, Orlando, Germana, Nando, Assunta, Eustachio, and Giacobbe. Their memories will remain so long as I live, and maybe, if these journals survive, for even longer.*

*As for the privateer bodies, I’ve told the crew to dump the bodies without shrouds— we don’t have the fabric to spare. We can spare a few more cannon balls to weigh them down at least. I wonder how Clemente feels about being unable to bury his own men. If it were me, I would be angrier than I already am having lost part of my crew. Knowing that this is now the third time he has left me, his family, behind, I don’t imagine this fight has left him feeling any remorse. I swear, the next time I see that bastard I will not let him get away from me.*

*Captain's Log: Mai 22<sup>nd</sup>, 17— A.D.*

*Location is approximately 41.338972, 7.333695. Weather is foggy, causing low visibility.*

*Food remaining: four crates of cured meats, two barrels of beer, three casks of water, one bag of bread, six crates of remaining butter, flour, and other foodstuffs.*

*Skirmish with Italian ship on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1789 A.D. Twelve men sustained injuries, four men dead and left on Italian ship. Retreated to prevent further casualties. Crew members lost: Cyril Archambault, Adrien Desroches, Frédéric Lachance, and Mathieu Planque.*

*Heading northwest towards Marseille, should arrive in a week barring any delays.*

**22<sup>nd</sup> di Maggio, 17—**

**I need to figure out what is wrong with me, preferably sometime before we return to Marseilles or run into Clio again. What sane man tells his younger sister, “I’ll track you down and commandeer your ship!”? I really hope she doesn’t actually think I want her in jail or dead. One would think a guy spending the last 18 years of his life pretending to be a fake identity would be better at improvising in potentially compromising situations, and yet here I am, putting my foot in my mouth once again. The worst part is that I don’t even think it was convincing to my crew.**

**I think Henri and the rest of my crew are already suspicious. I’ve never been adamant about taking out pirates before, and we’ve typically stuck to attacking British ships when we can tell the difference. Hopefully I’ll be able to play it off, and as long as I can convince Henri that everything is normal, the rest of the crew will believe it too. It is**

**frustrating that they trust my first mate more than they trust me, the captain, and this could be the start of potential plans of mutiny, so I need to keep an ear out.**

**My current plan is to spend as much time as possible holed up in my cabin. We're nearing port, so it's not that uncommon for me to be scarcely seen on deck. Hopefully it will all blow over, we can restock when we return to land, we'll take care of any business we need to attend to, and we can set out again.**

**Oh god. What am I going to write back to Mamma?**

*Captain's Log: Mai 23<sup>rd</sup>, 17— A.D.*

*Location is approximately 41.7185, 6.94172. Weather is foggy, though starting to clear.*

*Food remaining: four crates of cured meats, one and a half barrels of beer, two and three quarters casks of water, one bag of bread, five and a third crates of remaining butter, flour, and other foodstuffs. Some inconsistencies found in numbers, will be double checked tomorrow.*

*Still heading northwest towards Marseille, should arrive in a few days barring any delays.*

Clemente takes a moment to steel his nerves before the inevitable comes. As he gazes over the horizon, the salty breeze blows his bangs from his face. He sees some of the men of the ship glancing at him as they go about their duties. While he would like to believe the looks came from simply being unused to seeing their captain standing still, but he isn't a fool. Clemente can quite easily spot the glint of distrust in his crew members' eyes. He is also fairly certain that he

heard someone spit the moment his back was turned. He sighs and listens to the waves crash against the side of the boat.

“Captain, a word if you please.” Henri, in his usual state of seemingly perpetual irritation, stomps over to where Clemente is leaning on the side rail of the deck.

His first mate’s approach is not a surprise to Clemente, though he still jumps in shock at the harshness of Henri’s tone. “Of course, Henri, you know you do not have to ask me for permission to speak.”

The scowl on Henri’s face deepened. “In *private*, Captain,” he bites out, nodding a head toward the door to Clemente’s office. Clemente nods, and gestures for Henri to lead the way. He takes in one last breath of salty air before being stuck in his musty office for what was sure to be a long conversation.

**23<sup>rd</sup> di Maggio, 17—**

**My plan to hole up in my cabin did not go as well as I had hoped. Henri has let me know that there have been some issues with the record keeping, and it sounds like I’m going to have to count our supplies myself if anything is going to get done. Edouard and Louis will likely have to be removed from the crew once we return to Marseilles, as this is not the first time something like this has happened with them. I’ll have to spend the rest of the time on ship keeping a close eye on them— if we do have less food than was recorded, the next few days are going to be a bit rough.**

**I am a bit surprised that that was all Henri wanted to speak with me about. Maybe I really was able to play off that encounter with Clio’s ship. Or maybe he’s just biding his**

**time until after we get back to port. Despite working with him for a few years now, it's still not easy to tell what his next move will be. That unpredictability has always made him an asset in confrontations with other ships, but some days it does make me nervous.**

**I don't think I can wait for him to bring up anything he may have overheard from my...conversation...with Clio. At the very least, I need to let him know of my concerns about the state of the monarchy. If we need to renew our marque, he will have to travel to the capital with me. I'll try and mention it to him tomorrow.**

*Captain's Log: Mai 24<sup>th</sup>, 17— A.D.*

*Location is approximately 42.41055, 6.014081. Fog has cleared, sky is sunny.*

*Food remaining: two crates of cured meats, half a barrel of beer, one and a half cask of water, one bag of bread, three crates of remaining butter, flour, and other foodstuffs. Food will be more sparsely given until return to port. Louis Traverso and Edouard Belmont are being kept under strict watch.*

*Continuing to head northwest, with good wind we should hopefully arrive within three days.*

**Captain's Log: Mai 24<sup>th</sup>, 17— A.D.**

**———Location is approximately**

**24<sup>th</sup> di Maggio 17—**

**God I hate when I start writing in the wrong book. The food situation is much more stressful than I expected it to be. We have less than half of what was originally reported, which will make the next few days difficult. We cannot afford a bad turn in weather, and even just one day of wind in an unfavorable direction will force us to start going without eating. Most worrisome is the amount of beer and water remaining. I've ordered most men to stay below decks and out of the sun as much as possible, but I fear it will not be enough.**

**I can only wonder how Clio would handle a situation like this. I hope she hasn't been doing this long enough to have encountered this problem before, but from what I remember of her, something like this would devastate her. My men are used to occasionally having to go a bit without much in the way of food, but the first time I recall this happening was a situation I would never want to relive. Some of my men nearly killed each other over a small block of cheese, and it took myself and my first and second mate to pull one man off the other. I don't think it'll go that way this time, but if it does I won't be able to forgive myself this time. I'm the one who wanted to check out the ship we saw through the fog the other day, and if it weren't for that detour we might have made it home sooner.**

*Captain's Log: Mai 25<sup>th</sup>, 17— A.D.*

*Location is approximately 42.81461, 5.61851. Sunny skies, though a few rain clouds can be seen to the south.*

*Food remaining: one crate of cured meats, half a barrel of beer, one and a third cask of water, two thirds a bag of bread, two and a half crates of remaining butter, flour, and other foodstuffs. Food will be more sparsely given until return to port.*

*Continuing to head northwest, shore is beginning to come into view.*

The crew members are clearly getting more restless as the days of rationing continue on. Despite it being only the second day, Clemente can feel their ire any time he gives an order, their glares nearly cutting as sharp as his sister's sword through his beard. He matches every crew member's angry gaze with a menacing look of his own, which is enough for most of the men to back down and return to their work. However, Louis and Edouard remain as hostile as ever, no matter what Clemente tries.

Clemente paces in his office, the floorboards creaking with every other step. Henri sits in a chair, watching him with a bored look.

He claps once, drawing Clemente's attention to him. "Captain, why this much deliberation? Obviously they have both wronged the entire crew, as well as continued to show you and I both blatant disrespect. Throw them in the brig already!"

Clemente sighs, dragging his hand across his face as if trying to physically remove the stress from his expression. "That would be the ideal solution, Henri, if it weren't for the fact that we're a little short on crew members at the moment. We may only be a few days away from port, but we still need all the man power we can get if we want to make it there safely." Clemente resumes his pacing, though he continues to ramble at his first mate. "I suppose I could give them less rations than the rest of the crew as punishment? Though if they're not fed enough then their work will be even more subpar, which would be counter intuitive..."

Henri groans and slumps back in his seat. He eyes a map hanging on the wall, watching it shift slightly with every lap of Clemente's pacing. Suddenly, he stands up and makes for the door, startling Clemente.

"Henri, where are you going?"

Henri's grip on the door handle is tight, turning his knuckles white with the force. He does not turn to face Clemente, but he does respond with a simple, "To take care of the problem. I will return in half an hour, and when I do the matter will be resolved. Then, we will discuss whatever else we need to discuss before we can retire to bed."

Clemente opens his mouth as if to respond, but Henri exits before he gets the chance, slamming the door behind him. Realizing he doesn't have much choice but to wait for his first mate to return, he sits at the desk at the back of the room and begins to write in his log book.

Clemente finishes writing much quicker than he would have liked, leaving him to wait for Henri to return. He attempts to busy himself by organizing what is on his desk, but he only manages to get through half of the papers stacked haphazardly before the ship lurches in such a way that causes his arm to crash into the inkwell he had yet to store away to go flying, making him look as if he just lost a fight with a giant squid. He takes this as a sign to just wait for Henri.

*Captain's Log: Mai 26<sup>th</sup>, 17— A.D.*

*Location is approximately 43.07654, 5.29025. Rain clouds still behind, should still arrive in Marseille before the storm.*



*Food remaining: Half a crate of cured meats, two thirds of a cask of water, one third a bag of bread, one and three quarters crate of remaining butter, flour, and other foodstuffs. Food should be enough until we make it to port.*

*Shore is in view, should make land within a day and a half.*

**26<sup>th</sup> di Maggio, 17—**

**Sometimes I wish being a privateer was still like when I first started out. When I first left home it was simply because I wanted more than being back home could give me. Being disgraced nobility made it difficult to make connections with other people my age and older, and I wanted an education. An education that my family could not afford to provide. I hope that in no longer having to take care of me, my parents had an easier time taking care of Clio.**

**I often wish I could read the replies Mamma surely tries to send to my letters, but my constant travels make that quite difficult. It's possible she hasn't even forgiven me for leaving like I did. Did she show the letters to Clio too, or did she think that a five-year-old would not be able to understand that despite my letters I wasn't coming back? How long after I left did Clio stay home? Surely she at least waited until she was a teen, but I can't be sure. She's apparently captain of her own ship, but she's still so young! She can't be more than 24, and yet she's clearly accomplished so much. I'm proud of her, but I do wish I could have seen her grow up, even just a little bit.**

*“Clio, don’t run so far ahead!” You hear Mamma calling after you, but you ignore her— if you get home first, you won’t have to worry about missing the look on your brother’s face when he sees the gift Mamma had purchased with your help. Last year you lagged too far behind Mamma and he had spotted the pastry in her hands before you had even reached the front door. Mamma had insisted that his face looked the same when you got there as it did when he first saw the gift: excited and pleased and surprised all at once. You didn’t believe her though, so this time you had to be sure you saw it for yourself.*

Clio paces back and forth in front of her desk. She knows she doesn’t have much time before Daniel comes barging into her cabin to interrogate her on what had occurred between herself and the other captain. Clemente. Never did she think she would see him again, especially not in a situation like this. Her brain felt fried from attempting to process the day’s events.

Clio tosses herself onto her bed, letting the rocking of the boat soothe her for a moment. She’d told Daniel a bit about her past, as it would have been difficult and pointless to hide it from him considering how long they had been sailing together. She never told him the whole story, however, and she was not looking forward to recounting the day her life had changed so drastically.

*You skidded to a stop just before slamming into the closed front door. You tried to open it, but the doorknob wouldn’t turn. Locked. You turn around and spot Mamma just a few yards away. Hopping from foot to foot, you eagerly waited for her to reach the door and unlock it for you, barely noticing the confused look on her face as she plucked the key out of her dress pocket. The lock clicked and you immediately shoved your way past her, ignoring her chastising you for “bad manners.” If you were second in the door, and your brother was right in the entryway, you might miss his reaction again.*

A knock came from the door. “Captain? May I come in?”

Clio groans before rolling off of her bed. She makes her way over to the door and yanks it open, hoping to get this conversation over with quickly. On the other side of the door was, as expected, Daniel. There is a tear in his shirt, and a smear of blood near his hairline. “Is that yours?” she asks, gesturing toward his forehead.

Daniel’s mouth twists into a scowl. “You know what I’m here to talk about, so don’t you dare try and distract me.”

*He wasn’t in the entryway, so you ran down the hall in search of him. Your energy decreased as each room you checked turned up empty. Sullenly, you made your way back to Mamma, who assured you he must just be out in town celebrating with friends, and that he will surely be back soon. She promised to make you a small snack while you waited if you sat quietly in the sitting room. You pouted over being told to be still and quiet, but you were quite hungry and so made your way to the big cozy chair typically reserved for your father.*

Clio raises her hands in surrender. “I’m not trying to distract you, I swear! Sorry for caring about the well-being of my best friend.” She sweeps her arm towards the inside of her room. “You’re probably going to want to sit down for this.” He nods and follows her inside, rubbing at his forehead with the cuff of his sleeve.

Clio sits on her bed as Daniel sits in the chair at her desk. She waits a moment, but soon realizes that he was waiting for her to start the conversation. She sighs. “Before I go spilling my guts, what do *you* think you know about what just happened.”

Daniel hums in contemplation before deciding exactly what to say. “Well, for one, you definitely knew that other captain. And considering I didn’t recognize him, he must be someone

you met before me. That, combined with how you seem to be more upset than if you had run into a former crewmate, tells me that guy was someone you were pretty close with. Am I on the right track?”

*Utterly bored, you stared out the window, waiting for something remotely interesting to show up. Mamma eventually brought you your snack, but even after clearing your plate your brother still had not showed up. Mamma pulled out the bit of embroidery she had been working on, what looked like a new dress for you. Your face lit up in excitement and you scurried over to sit at her side to watch her work. The light in the room eventually dimmed as the sun began to set, and still your brother had not come home. “Mamma,” you asked, peering up at her frowning face, “why isn’t he home yet? Doesn’t he want to see what treat we got him this year?”*

Clio nods. “Yeah, that’s right. That captain was my older brother.”

Daniel looks shocked. He leans forward in his seat interest clearly piqued. “Your brother, Clemente, the guy you said disappeared without a trace when you were a little kid?”

Clio nervously wipes her sweaty palms on her pants, wondering how to go about this. “Yeah, that’s him. But I, uh, haven’t been entirely honest with you about him. He didn’t “disappear without a trace,” he sent a letter, telling us his friend had informed him about a learning opportunity over in France. He didn’t have the balls to tell us to our faces that he couldn’t stand to be in our home anymore, so the coward just wrote it in a letter that my parents never even let me read. I only found out because...” She swallows spit and tries to clear her throat.

*Just as she was about to answer, you heard the door open. Having decided it must be your brother, you jumped up and sprinted for the entryway. You slammed right into a pair of legs*

*before you could stop, and for one brief moment you were more excited than you could ever recall being. That excitement lasted until you heard the person whose legs you were wrapped around begin to laugh. “What’s got you so excited my dear?”*

“Because...?” Daniel prompts, always gentle, always careful. There was a reason that Clio trusted him even more than her first mate. She hated that she never told him all the details of what happened in her childhood. If she was being honest with herself, it was mostly just her own selfishness preventing her from sharing this with the man she called her best friend. She isn’t ready to confront her own feelings on the matter again, yet now she doesn’t have much of a choice.

*Your grin quickly turned into a frown. “I didn’t think it was you, Papá,” you murmured, once again disappointed that your brother had yet to show up. Papá looked around, as if he could spot what you could not with his superior height. “Your brother hasn’t come home yet? He left not long after you and your Mamma left, said he was going to meet with some friends. That’s odd...” He trailed off, and you slumped to the ground, landing on Papá’s shoes and crossing your arms in an effort to show exactly how displeased with the situation you were.*

*As the night wore on, he still failed to show up. Dinner went cold on the table before Mamma gave up on a full family dinner. Papá ate his food quickly, but you just sat there pushing the meat and greens around the plate. Eventually Mamma excused you from the table, and she was so distracted that you managed to escape having to take your bath before bed. Mamma and Papá both tucked you in. As they went to leave your room, you asked them to wake you if your brother returned. They shared a look before hesitantly promising that they would. You slept through the night.*

Daniel's fingers snap in front of Clio's face, bringing her out of the thoughts she was lost in. "Sorry, zoned out for a moment. I only found out he was gone for good when I overheard my mother in the next room over wailing in despair over the morning's mail. My parents thought I was still asleep. When I asked about it they refused to tell me, so I bided my time, and then when my parents were busy elsewhere I snuck into their room. Mother had just left the letter out on the desk, so it wasn't hard to find. I don't even remember what it said, exactly, but I was so angry I tore it to shreds." Daniel chuckles when I say that, likely finding amusement in how I haven't changed much from how I was as a child.

*Mamma's sobs the next morning rang through the house, which woke you up in the most unpleasant way possible. You carefully climbed out of bed, and quietly made your way down the hall to see what was going on. Mamma and Papá were huddled together around the table, Papá's face the grimmest you had seen it since your family had received news of your Nonna passing a few years prior. When you timidly asked them what was wrong, they just said that it was not for you to worry about. Later, around lunch, Papá sat you down in the sitting room and told you that your brother would be away for a while, but that he would likely be back before the month was over. Something told you not to believe him, so later that evening, when your parents were sitting together in silence, you snuck into their bedroom.*

*You immediately spot a piece of paper on the bedside table, and by the dying sunlight coming in through the nearby window you did your best to make out what was written there. Tears welled up in your eyes as you read more and more of it. The next thing you knew your parents had come rushing into the room, and your Papá was tugging shreds of paper out of your hands. Your throat hurt like it had after you had thrown a tantrum after your friends Adrianna and Evelina had accidentally broken your favorite doll. Mamma scooped you up into a hug,*

*apologizing for not telling you right away, but you weren't mad that she didn't tell you. You were mad that your brother decided that he cared more about learning fancy things than staying with your family. The people that loved him. You didn't understand why Mamma was so sad, why Papá wasn't as furious as you were.*

“Okay,” says Daniel, “so your brother left when you were, what, eight? There’s no way you would have recognized him after all this time.”

Clio sighs. What she plans on saying next is something she hasn't told anyone about. She fiddles with the hem of her jacket, trying to figure out how exactly she should explain herself. “Do you remember, six years ago, when we were between ships and we weren't even sure we could find a crew that would take us?”

Daniel sits up a little straighter. “Of course. We were around the coast of Tuscany and you just, disappeared for like a month!”

Clio grimaces. “Yeah, I'm still super sorry about that. I would have asked you to come with me but I was trying to check on my parents. If I came home with you, they would have made some assumptions neither of us would be comfortable with, so it was easier to just...sneak away.”

*You checked over the contents of your bag one last time. Bread. Cheese. Extra clothes. Map. Knife. With everything accounted for, you tied the bag closed. Daniel was asleep only a couple feet away, the final embers of the campfire that was between the two of you barely illuminating his silhouette. You trusted that he would know to follow your usual plan if you got separated, but it still was hard to leave with such little warning. However, you knew if you didn't leave now, you likely wouldn't be able to work up the courage again for years. You have braved*

*deadly storms and fierce battles, and yet the thought of going home again made you nervous like nothing else ever has.*

“So what,” Daniel asks, “did you see him at home or something?”

Clio shakes her head. “No, he’s never come home to my knowledge. But I got there, and my parents were so excited to see me. Mam— my mother was pretty quick to show me all the letters Clemente had apparently been sending her. In one of the more recent ones he had included a small portrait he had a friend draw of him? He obviously looked pretty different from what I remembered, so I spent days pouring over the letters, trying to figure out if it really was him, or if maybe someone was trying to scam my poor mother. From what I could tell, it was the real deal.” She pauses for a moment. “It was him, and I could take a pretty good guess as to where he’d be next.”

Daniel’s eyes widen as he realizes where this is going. “That’s why you were so insistent on getting on a ship to Sardinia when we met back up!”

“Exactly. And when we did get there, I was entirely ready to be wrong, or to have missed my chance to see him again.”

“But you saw him?”

*You did a double take as you opened the door of the local butcher’s shop. There, arguing with the butcher over the price of some pork, was a man who looked strikingly similar to the sketched portrait in the letter your mother had shown you. He was clean-shaven, but his brown hair was a little longer and lighter in shade than you remembered it being. He was clearly a sailor of some sort. The clothes he was wearing weren’t quite military in style, but they still evoked a sense of authority that made you uneasy. Before you could confront him, you heard*



*Daniel call for you down the street. Your brother also looked like he heard: he seemed to stiffen at your name. He shrugged it off, though, and continued his debate with the butcher. Daniel called for you again, and you knew your chance to confront Clemente was running out. A young man you assumed was an apprentice politely asked you to either come in and order something or get out. You looked at your brother, and back out the door, then back to your brother before making your decision. You apologized to the apprentice and dashed out the door, found Daniel, and told him it was time to leave. Your best friend did not question you, just readjusted his bag on his shoulder and let you lead him through the crowd.*

Putting her head in her hands, Clio groans. “I saw him, Dan. I saw him and I ran away like a fucking *coward!*” She feels his hand grab her wrist, as if to pull it away and uncover her face. She twists out of his grip and stands up suddenly.

“You’re not a coward for—”

“I am,” she growls at him. “I spent years absolutely enraged with what his actions did to our family! Mamma and Papá were never the same after he left. Mamma cried every day. Papá almost never was home for more than a few hours. And on the rare occasion they paid any attention to me, it was smothering! It was a miracle I was able to leave the house after the stunt he pulled, and the thought that he was just living a normal life as a normal guy made me so goddamn angry.”

Her breathing is labored as she finally brings her gaze up to meet Daniel’s. She can’t place the expression on his face, but something about it just makes her angrier. Angrier at him, angrier at her brother, and especially angrier at herself.

“I’ve wanted to punch him in his stupid face since the day he left and ruined everything, but then I finally had my chance and I didn’t do it. He was right there, and I just took the coward’s way out and ran.” Clio doesn’t realize that she’s clenching her fists until she feels Daniel take her hands in his once again. There’s a little bit of blood on her palms where her nails had been pushing into the skin. He grabs a rag off of Clio’s desk and presses it to her palm. She lets out a sob.

He doesn’t look up at her as he works on cleaning her hands. “Are you done?” Clio nods. “Good. Now listen, because I will not repeat myself. You’re not a coward to for not being willing to face him back then. If you had tried to run away immediately when his crew attacked us today, yeah, I would say you’re a coward, but you didn’t. You fought alongside your crew until the enemy retreated, despite your personal connection to the enemy captain. Don’t think I didn’t see that you drew blood when you fought him. That takes guts, to hurt someone you used to care about.”

Clio winces at that. “Ah, well, you see, it’s a little worse than that.” Daniel gives her an encouraging look. She takes a shaky breath before continuing, “I think I do still care about him. I thought I hated him but I think I actually just miss him. And now he’s pretty much promised to turn me in to authorities the next time we see each other, so I can’t just go seeking him out again!”

Daniel drops her hands and the rags. Glancing at him, Clio doesn’t think he’s shocked. He looks angrier than surprised, though Clio isn’t sure if the anger is directed towards her or the situation. She opens her mouth to defend herself but he jerks a hand up to quiet her. “Clio, while that is very depressing, can you tell me where your anger went? You were so enraged at the mere

thought of your brother for years, and now that he's pretty much sworn to kill you, you're just going to hide from him forever?"

She huffs in annoyance. "First you want me to calm down, and now you want me to be pissed off again? Sorry Daniel, but I'm a bit tired of my emotions jumping all over the place today."

Clio moves to push past him and leave the room. He grabs her wrist again. "Clio, wait—"

"Daniel, let go. That is an order from your Captain. In case you forgot, we are now ten men shorter than we had planned for this trip, so both of us are going to be pretty busy for the foreseeable future, so can we drop it?" He drops her hand, and Clio is almost relieved before she sees the look on his face. If she thought he was angry before, the look on his face currently can't compare.

"Okay *Captain*," he spits, "we can drop it. I wouldn't want to force my poor cowardly captain out of her comfort zone." He bows sarcastically before leaving the room ahead of her. "See you at dinner, I guess." He slams the door behind him, leaving Clio behind in the empty room, with only the creaking of the walls and the rocking of the boat to keep her company.

**Dear Mamma,**

**I know it's a bit soon to be sending you another letter, but I have returned to land much quicker than I had originally anticipated. I figured you would still appreciate an update on my wellbeing, so I squeezed in some time between errands to write to you.**

**I hope you and Papà are doing well. I know I have refrained from asking in the past, but I do hope Clio is also well. Quite often I wish there were a way for you to send me a reply, though I still do not trust Jean-Marc to leave me my privacy if he were to receive mail for me. It took quite a long time for me to be comfortable asking him to send these to you, and while he has not broken my trust yet, something about his demeanor tells me he would like nothing more than to read any replies you send. Admittedly, part of my reluctance to trust him may also be merely an excuse to avoid seeing whatever you may have to say to me. I'm sure you and Papà both are still quite infuriated with me for my disappearing act, and seeing any of your anger or sadness would ruin me, I fear.**

**Mamma, I must confess that I miss home dearly. Work on my ship has been quite stressful as of late, and my crew has been giving me nothing but trouble. It is never a good day in port when the first thing one must do is turn over formerly trusted crew members to police, but unfortunately their crimes against the rest of the crew were too grave to allow them to continue to work for me. After they are dealt with, Henri and I must attempt to gain an audience with the new king. A new king means we need a new letter of marque to continue to work. I can only hope he approves our request.**

**I must end here, sadly. Hopefully, my next letter will contain news of happier events.**

**Love,**

The port town is as busy as ever as Clemente and his first mate Henri make their way towards a tavern in the middle of town. The cool ocean breeze threatened to knock loose Clemente's hat, though he makes no attempt to adjust it to a more secure position. Unlike the bustle of people and animals moving around them, Henri and Clemente are entirely silent during their journey. Clemente feels as if he could slice through the silence between them with his sword if he tried, the determined set of Henri's face only causing Clemente more unease.

Eventually they make it to their preferred meeting place, a tavern only marginally less busy than the streets surrounding it, even as early in the day as it is. They swiftly make their way to their preferred table to talk business at, a booth in the back corner. There is already a group of people sitting there, three men who appear to be in their fifties, likely fishermen recently back from their morning shift. One glance at Clemente and Henri's uniforms and weapons has the men grab their things, scowling and grumbling about hatred of the Navy men that "intruded on our town."

Henri is the first to sit down in the newly vacated booth. "You'd think after all this time they would realize we're not Navy," he says.

Clemente eyes him warily as he sits on the opposite side of the booth. "Yes, though I imagine they would despise us just as much if they realized we were privateers instead." He waves down a waitress and requests two beers. She nervously rushes to the bar to fill the order, quickly disappearing into the crowded and dingy room.

The din of voices and clanking glasses provides a perfect way to keep Henri and Clemente's conversation as private as possible. The moment the skittish waitress leaves them their drinks, the two men lock eyes, ready to get down to business.

Henri is the first to speak. "Captain, I would appreciate if you would stop trying to play me for a fool. That altercation with those pirates was both wildly out of character for you and terribly disastrous for our crew. We lost more men than were necessary, especially considering that we do not even have any reward to show for it." He is glaring across the table at Clemente, completely ignoring the drink in front of him.

Clemente rubs his hand across his face, taking a deep, steadying breath before responding. "Henri, I do not appreciate you questioning my decisions. As long as you and the rest of the crew call me Captain, I am the one in charge. You, as my first mate, may give me your input on my decisions, but you did not make any attempts to compel me to avoid that ship. You could consider yourself lucky that the crew would rather blame just me instead of the both of us." He takes a sip of his drink, setting it down gently before he continues. "I understand your frustration, and your grief over the loss of crew members, but I have more important things to focus on, and I would appreciate if you could do your job regardless of your personal feelings on the matter."

Henri scoffs before tearing his gaze away from Clemente. "Fine. I would prefer to come back to this at some point, but you are correct. How sure are you that the new king will be willing to renew our letter of marque?"

Clemente sighs. "Honestly? I'm not certain. I haven't heard much about the new king yet, but we don't really have much time to learn more about him before our hearing with him is

scheduled.” He picks at a chip in the wood of the table, trying to think of some sort of plan to convince the king.

Henri finally drinks from his glass as the two sit in silence, mulling over what to do. He looks around the tavern, taking note of the multiple groups of people huddled together and whispering while sending nervous or hateful glances towards their little booth in the back. Just as he is about to mention to Clemente that they should probably leave before someone tries to start a fight, the man they knew to be the owner of the establishment approaches their table.

“Boys, you and I both know that you’re not Navy, but I can only tell the other patrons that so many times before it gets tirin’. Is there any way I can convince you two to leave before I start losin’ business? The increased military presence in the area has been makin’ my customers anxious, and your presence here is not helpin’ matters.” The man looks as if he genuinely feels bad for kicking them out, though Clemente knows he will not hesitate to get physical if they refuse.

Clemente sees Henri preparing to argue, so he quickly puts on a smile and places a few coins down to cover the cost of their drinks. “Sure thing sir! We’re terribly sorry to have worried your customers. Have a wonderful rest of your day, and hopefully you don’t mind if we pop in at a later date once things have calmed down around here.” The bar owner happily collects the money Clemente left and waves goodbye and the privateers leave the dimly lit tavern and return to the bright midday outside.

**30<sup>th</sup> di Maggio, 17—**

**Henri and I have begun the journey to meet with the new king. Henri still seems to be upset with me about those events at sea, but he hasn't pressed me about my interactions with Clio, so I believe I may be in the clear. If not, I at least have some time to come up with an explanation. Hopefully the rest of the crew does not get too restless while we are away.**

**The ride so far has been quite easy. The weather has been fair, and the horses have been calm and agreeable. It should only be another day's ride until we arrive at our destination. I'm still not sure how likely the new king is to help us, but hopefully he will grant our request with the same ease as the last king. All I have heard of the new king is that he is quite young for his station, so maybe that means he will not care about our request enough to spare us a thought. That could be beneficial to us, in that he may approve our request without us having to defend our case. Unfortunately, apathy could also mean our request will be denied without hearing us out. I try to remain optimistic, but I do feel the need to come up with a back-up plan. The crew will not be happy to hear that they need to find other work, and may turn their anger towards me, so I may have to lay low for a bit. Jean-Marc may be willing to let me stay with him for a bit, but that will only buy me time until I have to find some other source of income. Oh well, I suppose I'll plan past that only if it proves necessary.**

Clemente and Henri are led through a grand hall, extravagant tapestries lining the walls and their footsteps echoing up to the highest ceiling anyone could dream of seeing. Not for the first time walking down this hall, Clemente wonders if his family home could have come anywhere near the splendor of this palace had his family not fallen from grace all those years



ago. The only sound other than their steps is the clank of the armor of the guards guiding them to the large oaken doors at the end of the hall.

The doors are wide open, and a line of people extends through it. Not much else can be seen through the doorway, no matter how Clemente cranes his neck to see past the people. Eventually they reach the end of the line, and are told to wait until their turn for an audience with the new king. The two make hushed conversation with the people in front of them in line, a group of farmers that are there to request a temporary decrease in taxes until they can regain the labor lost by the recent draft of their sons into the military. Henri expresses his shock that the king is receiving so many audiences in a day, and the farmers explain that they are just as surprised as he is. It seems that the king has been hearing as many people's requests in a day as possible starting nearly as soon as he took the throne.

They pass a few hours in this way, discussing what rumors they've heard and what they hope the king is like, before finally the farmers are called for their turn to speak to the king. Clemente and Henri then take the time they have remaining to examine what they can see of the room. There are large windows that look out onto the gardens, the sun setting casting a golden hue over the entirety of the room. There is a large green rug leading from the doorway to the throne at the back of the room, muffling any footsteps taken by the people in line as they progress through the room.

The throne itself is much larger than Clemente would consider necessary for one person. Even from far away, the seat looks as if it could hold three or four grown men comfortably. The wood it is made of is a luxurious dark brown, polished smooth and shining. The seat and back is upholstered with a plush looking green fabric that reminds Clemente of his mother's favorite

dress. The king himself seems tiny in comparison to the seat, his head barely reaching past the center of the throne's back.

Henri's hand on his arm reminds Clemente to pay attention as they are called to approach the throne. The two men immediately take a knee once they are a proper distance from the throne. From up close and near the ground, the throne looms even larger than Clemente expected. The last time he had requested a letter of marque in person had been nearly a decade ago, and each time after that the former king, or rather, some employee of the former king, had just sent it out without prompting, a courier always already there in the port when Clemente and crew docked. Clemente does not have the time to examine what is the same as the last time and what is different, however, as the king speaks not long after Clemente and Henri kneel down.

"State your name and purpose," he commands. Clemente looks up a bit from his bowed position to get a better look at the king before he responds. The king's face is clean shaven, making him appear much younger than Clemente suspects he actually is. His eyes are a piercing green, the color only emphasized by the green of both the throne and the extravagant robes the king is wearing. The king looks down his strong nose at the two men, and Clemente knows he should look away despite his inability to bring himself to do so. "Well?" the king sneers, "Are you going to answer me or not? There is quite the line behind you and only so many hours left in the day." Clemente thinks he can understand why so many people in history have considered kings to be like gods, if this is how all kings are. Out of the corner of his eye he notices Henri shooting him a confused look.

"Ah, yes, my apologies, Your Majesty. I merely found it difficult to find my words in the presence of your splendor." Clemente returns his gaze to the ground, hoping the praise is enough to avoid angering the king. "I am Captain Clemente Chaput, and this is my first mate, Henri

Lavinge. We come requesting a renewal for our letter of marque, so we may continue serving the crown as privateers.”

The king seems to think on it for a while, and Clemente expects to just wait in tense silence. Henri, however, remains as impatient as ever. “Your Majesty, if it may convince you,” he starts, “we recently had an encounter with some Italian pirates, not far from the coast. We lost quite a few men and had to retreat, and who knows how many other French ships they have attacked. If given a renewed letter of marque, we can track them down before they harm any more of your citizens.”

Clemente tries to look at Henri without making it obvious there is discord between them, only to his first mate sending him a smug look in return. The king claps once to draw their attention back to him. “Well, with that compelling of an argument, how could I say no? Timothée?”

A lanky man jolts up in his seat next to the king. “Yes, Your Majesty?”

“Have their letter of marque written up as soon as possible. And have someone make them up a room in one of the guest halls. I will not be able to sign the papers until late this evening, and I would hate for them to make a long trip tonight and then again tomorrow.”

Timothée nods. “Yes, sire, right away.”

The king nods, satisfied with the quick response. “Chaput, Lavinge, you are dismissed. Please follow Timothée to wherever he leads.”

The two men stand and bow, before following the servant out into the hall and down multiple winding corridors. Eventually they reach a door in a hall lit only by a few sconces on the wall.

“Gentlemen,” Timothée says, “I hope this room is to your liking. Someone will come to collect you in the morning. Have a good night.” He nods, and Clemente and Henri nod in return.

Once behind closed doors, Clemente whirls to face Henri, shoving his finger up against his first mate’s chest. “What was with that back there? I’m the captain, therefore I make the calls on how we discuss matters of the ship. In what world do you have the right to undermine me? If I thought it was important to inform the king of that pirate ship, I would have said it from the start.”

Henri backs up a bit, face hardening into a scowl before he retorts, “If I hadn’t mentioned it, we probably would not have gotten what we wanted! It was a strategic choice.”

“Okay, well, your ‘strategic choice’ has a very real chance of fucking over our usual port. The king might decide, ‘oh! Pirates near our shore? We must send more of our military out at once to protect the people!’ You were there when we could barely get a drink at our normal tavern the other day. Imagine how much worse it will be now,” Clemente huffs.

Henri rolls his eyes. “I don’t think things will get worse than that, and even if they did, we can just find another port town. Why do you even care? We got what we needed and can set sail as soon as we get back and get more supplies.”

Clemente sighs and plops down on one of the two beds in the room before kicking off his boots. “I care because my only point of contact with someone that isn’t a crew member is in that port, and having to change where we dock would be extremely inconvenient. I also care, because

you committed an act of clear insubordination, and I could kick you off my crew for less than that.” He drapes his jacket over the bedpost at the head of the bed. “But I won’t. We should just sleep so we can get the letter of marque and leave as soon as possible.”

Henri frowns, obviously displeased with the end of the conversation. They prepare for bed in silence, only speaking once Clemente stood to blow the sole candle in the room. “Wait,” spoke Henri. “What took you so long to speak to the king in the first place? Your hesitance could have been what cost us the marque. It’s mostly why I felt it necessary to speak when I did.”

Clemente pauses, trying to come up with some way to explain how he spent that time staring at the king rather than thinking.

“Did you also notice?”

“Notice what, Henri?” Clemente doubts they were thinking the same thing when looking at the king, but if he goes with whatever Henri says, he might be saved from making a fool of himself.

Henri gave Clemente an exasperated look. “That the king looks suspiciously like the late princess! Do you not remember? Her portraits were plastered all over the country for months a few years ago.”

“Oh, yes! I’m glad you caught it as well, I was thinking I might be crazy.” He does not actually remember anything about this princess, but he’ll go along with whatever Henri says so they can end their conversation and go to sleep. “I’m sure it’s merely coincidence. Goodnight Henri.”

Clemente blows out the candle.

Poetry

## **Folding Hearts I**

**Start with paper, color side down.**

No need to fish in the murky lake of my mind-  
the feelings are there, dancing on the top like waterbugs.  
I grab the skimmer,  
pull them out,  
and start my craft.

## **The Break Room is not for Break Downs**

As a blobfish, I look normal under pressure:  
Maybe not beautiful,  
But I'm not a melting puddle of jelly.  
I think.

That stalactite of panic is definitely there,  
Securely stuck to the ceiling of the store  
Until my worrying hands hook into it.  
I wrench it from where it's firmly secured  
So that it hits the ground  
And shatters  
Into tiny bits of anxiety between my teeth:  
A honey lozenge that won't soothe  
Despite what the label promises.

My mouth is filled with crunchy bits that stick—  
No eating at the registers!  
Customers don't want to see  
Any indication that you need to refuel.  
That's disgusting.

Don't drop that Trader Joe's smile!  
Hope you have a great day!



## **A (not) Girl and Their Dog**

The villagers in Animal Crossing threw me a birthday party,  
with small cake in the middle of a dim room,  
tinny music coming out of the speakers of my DS,  
the cow told me to make a wish.  
I didn't expect to share my thoughts, so I typed,  
"I just want 2 see ppl again."  
She says, "I'll be sure to make it come true!"  
She's only a digital creature, so she doesn't know that  
it can only be just me  
and my dog.

I've had many birthdays  
where I didn't see my friends  
because my birthday was often during spring break, but  
I've never had a birthday  
where I couldn't hug my mom.  
It's odd to be lonely  
stuck inside with three other people,  
but my brother has barricaded himself in his room,  
and my dad is still working, piling dead bodies into trucks,  
and my mom lays on her stomach just to be able to breathe.  
So for my birthday party that leaves just me  
and my dog.

I've become nocturnal  
and as I watch the sunrise through the window  
I dream of a future  
where I can share a bed with my partner again-  
one we both fit in,  
where I can see their face in the morning light.  
As I curl up to sleep 'til 5,  
I'm reminded that for now  
it's just me  
and my Ghost.

*For Ghost, the stinkiest, silliest dog I know*

## **Folding Hearts II**

**Fold in half, make a triangle.**

It has only been a month since I last saw them.  
Has only been a few hours since we last spoke.  
But texting and being in each other's presence has a different feeling.  
If I swap the skimmer for a net, the feelings are too big to work with.  
It's better to work with a smaller paper.  
**Unfold.**

## Spit it Out

It really is terrible how  
you can know a word exists,  
but never hear it for the most part.  
But then you hear one person say it.  
and from then on  
it's on everyone's tongue—  
more common than chewing gum  
but just as indigestible.

I have always hated gum.  
The wetness and the sound and the  
*squish*  
*squish*  
*squish*  
make me want to throw up,  
so I make do with mints and gummy bears instead.  
It makes me feel crazy  
when I notice someone snap their gum,  
I think,  
“surely I’m not the only one who notices.  
surely someone else will point it out”  
but no one does.

Other people start snapping their gum too  
and somehow it seems  
like I’m the only one who can’t stand the sound.

## **A Carrot a Day Won't Fix This / A a Carrot Day Fix This Won't**

Squeezed between fingers / pressure outside the lashes find the intruder cry it out rinse it out /  
light comes in never let out / covered and useless uncovered and still kinda useless / doesn't  
process what's given tries to take and take and take / no communication on its own must be  
paired— Do Not Separate Frequently Bought Together / mine match do yours? / chameleon to  
the walls to clothes to responding to the sun blue but green but flash purple strike fear / open  
wide soul visors / contain all contain nothing / nobody's home / you can tell

all and and and and be between blue Bought but but can chameleon clothes comes  
communication contain contain covered cry Do do doesn't fear find fingers flash Frequently  
given green home in intruder it it its kinda lashes let light match mine must never no nobody's  
Not nothing on open out out out outside own paired pressure process purple responding rinse  
Separate soul Squeezed still strike sun take take take tell the the the the to to to to to Together  
tries uncovered useless useless visors walls what's wide you yours?

### **Folding Hearts III**

**Fold the top down to the crease. Fold the bottom to the top.**

Think about how, technically, others have it worse.

The distance isn't that far.

The separation isn't for that long.

But just because I have a pool noodle, and others have an oar with no boat  
does not mean that one is better equipped to survive the flood than the other.

## **Something Peculiar**

Wander, lost children  
and let the flamelight guide.  
Dreamy feelings return as spirits watch:  
their hallucinations beckon.  
Vengefulness drags hearts,  
leeches life into malice reborn,  
leaving sleeping shells  
restless and twitching,  
waiting for travelers—  
their next victims.  
Please young one,  
leave.  
Don't you dare return.

Or stay.

Give this decrepit building  
more tales and legends  
of a child singing hollow dreams.  
The elegant elegy,  
intentionally infinite,  
absorbs all who hear  
into its cemetery.

Most words from various pokedex entries found on [bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/](http://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/)

## **A series of emails**

Sorry MGF,

I could not do the homework because I had a terrible headache and trying to read all twenty-seven pages was a nightmare to my eyes.

Sorry MGF,

I could not do the homework because the paper was so bland it inspired no ideas for what to talk about for 200 words.

Sorry MGF,

I could not do the homework because the podcast didn't have a transcript and my ears don't work.

Sorry MGF,

I could not do the homework because I ate a lot of pasta and it made my tummy hurt.

Sorry MGF,

I could not do the homework, as I could not stop thinking about what Christmas gift I should get my partner.

Sorry MGF,

I could not do the homework. I was having a gender crisis, and I think you'd agree that that was more important than listening to a podcast about wine.

Sorry MGF,

I could not do the homework because my neighbors were smoking cigarettes and the smell hurt my nose.

Sorry MGF,

I could not do my homework because I stayed up too late chatting with my roommates and by the time we stopped I was too sleepy.

Sorry MGF,

I could not.

## **Folding Hearts IV**

**Fold the sides diagonally, so they meet at the center.**

I know that bottling the water is pointless,  
unless I give it to them to drink.  
They love me.  
It will not bother them.  
I love them.  
It wouldn't bother me.



**An excessive joint movement in which the angle formed by the bones of a particular joint is straightened beyond its normal range of motion**

I had to stop because of the high frequency of hyperextension, by which I don't mean I pulled my elbow back just a little too far

By which I *do* mean when I balance on a table when I'm wearing short sleeves they gross people out.

I had to stop because my mom was worried it would break and I was tired of trying to figure out the brace so no more ten pin bowling for me! Candlepin duckpin five pin nine pin there used to be more but they're a lot harder to set up these days and it's a dying sport anyway because no one knows how to fix broken lanes

Don't think I'll know how to fix it if it breaks but I don't think it will break it will just extend and extend and extend bend until it breaks but it won't break it will just extend and extend and extend

But that's fine I'll just keep wrapping that stupid brace around the arm above no the arm below? On top?

It doesn't work because it doesn't support what I need maybe I'll find a child size knee brace A baby size knee brace that will still be too large since I won't be putting it in the right place there is no right place wait actually there is a right place hyperextension does not mean it will pop out of place and I have never dislocated a joint though I guess if it doesn't know where it should stop then it doesn't have a place to be dislocated from it just has a place where its more comfortable

My kneecaps twist weird and that freaks doctors out but that's not the same because that one doesn't hurt if I do it too much sometimes I twist my arms around my head in a way most people can't and I guess I hyperextend them to do it but I didn't think I did but the way they hurt afterwards is different from the way my wrists hurt after although I guess bowling makes my wrists hurt too but that's an easier brace to figure out

It is usually comfortable but that's just because I don't move it but sometimes it hurts when I haven't moved it I stopped working in a grocery store where I loved most customers and I loved most coworkers but picking up an empty bag was enough to throw my back out my back does not hyperextend it doesn't even extend

I didn't actually stop bowling because of the hyperextension I stopped because I was terrified of being late to work afterwards even though there was an hour of break between and five minutes of driving distance between but I was terrified of being late so I gave it up and my biggest concern wasn't what would happen to my teammates and it wasn't what my brother would do without me there I was just scared that the guy who ran the league would comment to my mom about how he hasn't seen me in a while even though he knows I'm too old to be in the league anymore

## **Can I please get a heat pack?**

Thirty three minutes  
is not enough time for the four  
chewable childrens' motrin to  
kick in so all thirty three vertebrae  
continue to kick my ass:  
the last nine especially,  
which I will blame Trader Joe's for  
even though it's been a month  
so it can't really be blamed anymore  
But! On my last day the new guy  
got to watch a safety video and all I got  
was some free babka and a shopping bag. I don't use  
the bag because if it gets too full  
those thirty three vertebrae hurt again but  
the grape chewables are \$8.79 a bottle  
and there's only twenty four chalky discs inside,  
once again leaving those last nine  
unaccounted for,  
so I'll just try lying down instead,  
but after too long the thirty three vertebrae  
start to hate being horizontal  
so I have to stand up once again,  
and now I'm all out of motrin  
so that's why I'm here again,  
buying more and maybe  
I'll grab a heat pack while I'm at it.

## Moving

I moved back home four months ago  
and still there are bags of my things I have yet to unpack.  
Stacks of video games  
bags of clothes  
shelves worth of books.

I do this everywhere I go,  
hotels,  
dorms,  
my grandmother's house.  
My bags stay packed,  
ready to go once more at a moment's notice.

Why do I give myself the same excuses?  
"I don't need what's inside and it keeps them in one place out of the way."  
"If I move them from there I'll forget where I put them so it's just easier."  
"It's a waste of time since I'll just be packing them again soon enough."  
None of these are really true  
now, in this situation,  
despite how I wish the last one would be.  
But just because I dream  
of a home elsewhere,  
with someone else,  
there is no excuse for this mess I could so easily organize,  
no matter how permanent it would make this room feel.

If this room—  
this house—  
is permanent,  
it feels harder to envision that future home:  
a place of freedom and adulthood that I have yearned for  
for years. Will I be stuck here?  
In yearbooks and photo frames,  
dust gathering,  
colors fading,  
stored away like a childhood toy?

## **Folding Hearts V**

### **Turn it over.**

Last night they helped me,  
kept me from drowning in a pond  
unrelated to the one I am folding my feelings into.  
If that was no issue to them  
then this should be no problem to share.

## **My gender is a skittish creature**

I am sitting on the ground  
with a plate of food nearby,  
with you, my gender, watching warily from a safe distance.  
I attempt to coax you closer with food  
and soft words  
and whispering *psspss*  
but mostly I am just waiting for you to come close  
enough so I can see you clearly.

You are eternally in my peripheral  
but perhaps one day  
your hunger will win out  
over your wariness,  
and you will let me hold you close like I crave.

## Advice

Look back, see the chasm:  
opened pit with no way out.  
Go west, find the edge, see—  
once there were stars  
now unseen, gone to sleep.

A voice says from below,  
“Brave hero, drag your dreams from Hades-  
what seems dead can come back.  
God forgave you long ago.  
Start clearing your head,  
refuse the abyss,  
wake the stars from their sleep.”

Tug a thousand gold hopes  
from the dark pull anything you can  
out to the sky. Feel the first shaking  
breeze, and rise-  
your feet know the way.

All words from the twelfth chapter of *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan

## Spit it Out 2

A more minor rule at my new job  
is no chewing  
in sight of the guests.  
We are told it is rude  
and unsightly,  
so if we must do it, it must stay  
in the closet.

On my fourth day on the job  
my coworker  
offered me some gum before popping a piece in their mouth  
and chewing it for the next hour  
as we led guests to their tables  
and took reservations.  
I spent that hour nervous, wondering  
if a manager,  
or at least another employee,  
would notice or overhear  
but no,  
the other employees are doing it too.  
The more stressed they got,  
the louder it  
*popped*  
and *snapped*.

They entertained the idea  
of sticking the chewed wad  
in a server's hair for not being fast enough.  
I wanted  
so badly  
to reach into their mouth  
and grab it  
and place it on a table in front of our managers.

I wanted to say,  
“look, how can you allow  
them to blow these huge bubbles  
in plain sight, for our guests to see!  
How can you accept this  
pink-gray blob sticking  
in your employees' mouths?”  
but I know this coworker just got a second job  
to support their family.  
I don't want to be the one to ruin their life

so even though I know I could easily expose  
everything they've said since I started here  
I stay silent  
yet still unable to digest their words.



## **Folding Hearts VI**

**Fold the top and side points in.**

In my hands I nearly hold its solid form.  
A longing that feels a little less irrational.  
A drop in the water of the jar I should give them.  
But TSA guidelines state  
that 3.4 ounces is the maximum you can bring with you,  
and this jar of paper hearts I have put together  
will far exceed that  
before I ever stop missing you.

**Flip it back over.**