

## The Tale of Gwendolyn Gwilt – Prologue

Carynne Dati

Sunset...

Daylight barely lingered in the air when the ship slowly docked in the London port. It knew not to come in too conspicuous, much to the eagerness of her crew. A false flag was drawn up to hide her true face. Even the name on her side was not her real name. After all, the *Fenris* was not exactly welcome in any port.

Most of the crew was anxious to dock. For months they had been out on the high seas with little hope of seeing civilization again. Tonight was the first night on land on several months and their desires were wanting. They had not seen other human beings apart from each other for a long time, nor had they had a taste of other earthly pleasures. As the ship finished docking, the men gazed out into the city before each one turned over to their captain, leaning casually on the mast post. The wide brim of her hat kept her face shadowed with only the light from her oak pipe illuminating her face, stoic and cold.

“The night is yours, gentlemen. Unless you hear otherwise, meet back here at midnight. No later. If all goes well, then you’ll get the whole night. Understood?” The men grunted in impatient approval. With a small nod, she dismissed the men. They hastily left the ship, howling and whooping as they rushed into the city. Some men ventured down below deck to gather some other effects. The only man that remained still on the ship was a tall ragged man. As the last of the crew leapt off the ship, he merely gazed out at them. He wanted to go, but it could wait. There was something he needed to know first.

“You’re not going with them?” the captain asked of him. “You seemed the most eager to get back on land.”

“I will,” he responded. “I just wanted to ask you something first.” The woman leaned up from the mast and removed her hat, revealing a faded maroon bandanna underneath covering light brown hair. Upon it bore the emblem of the wolf, similar to the flag that showed the ship’s true nature. She gave her first mate a look before walking past him and leaning on the ship’s edge. She gazed out where the rest of her crew gathered, telling each other what they had planned during their stay. She could only let out a soft laugh for them. She was glad that they had a chance to relieve some of their stress. It had been a rough journey.

The man stood by her at the ship’s edge, tightening the knot on his black skullcap that covered his long tangled hair. “Captain Gwilt, we have been out at sea for months,” he began. “We’ve had a fair amount of profit and have had quite a bit of excitement. I’m not to say that we’re not grateful but... well, some of the men have been talkin’ and –”

“From your tone, I would say that something is concerning you greatly... You would not be thinkin’ of what I think you are...” She kept her gaze to the dimming city of London, not looking to see her underling’s reaction. Had she looked, she would have not seen anything regardless.

The man kept his calm demeanor and let out a small grin. What sounded like a threat from the captain, he knew to be an empty one. This was not to doubt her authority. The whole crew knew better than to challenge their captain. A man would be foolish to even think he could do so and live to tell about it. All who slept in that ship knew what a dangerous woman the captain was. They had heard tales of her ferocity and cruelty. Some have even witnessed it firsthand. Even fewer lived to tell of it. This man was one of them and never did he wish to witness it again.

But the crew also had no grounds to challenge her. Every plundering they've ever taken, she split the profits among her crew first, so long as she picked out the minuscule things she wanted first. She even took care of her crew, ensuring that every crewman was at his prime. She never over-worked the crew and she always made sure that they were as well fed as possible. She, herself, was not a pirate. Her crewmen were pirates. But since she governed them, it made her a pirate by proxy. To her, she was merely a collector... and a hunter.

"You and I both know that the crew would never dream of mutiny."

"I know that, Nemo. I could never have done any of this were it not for you."

"Of course you would, just not as stylishly." The captain looked at the man called Nemo with emerald green eyes and smiled, perhaps for the first time since this whole journey started. It relaxed him to see that smile. "But the crew is smart. They've been wonderin' after months at sea, why London?" His captain sighed heavily as the smile slowly faded away from her face. She had expected this question earlier than now. As her eyes drew back to the port, Nemo understood. "There's somethin' here, isn't there. Somethin' you need?"

"You were always an observant one, Nemo," she replied. "I need to find someone. Two people, actually"

"Who?"

"They're both mages," she replied, almost spitting out the final word. She took along huff of her pipe before continuing. "I know of one them lives here."

"What does Captain Gwendolyn Gwilt want mages for?" Nemo asked with great curiosity and a hint of jest.

"I do not *want* them..." Her body shivered with the thought of encountering a mage. It was one thing that she could do successfully, but never liked doing so. "But I need to find them."

"Why?"

Gwen took a heavy sigh and gazed at the burning tobacco left in her pipe. "You remember that place I told you about?" Nemo turned to her slowly and nodded. "I need mages in order to get there, but not just any mages will do. It has to be two specific mages... one of the day and one of the night. I need you to keep your eyes and ears open."

Nemo nodded at this, but also began to grow concerned. Since this whole expedition began, his captain had made sure that she took care of everything that she needed to do. Her crew would only come with her to help reap the benefits, but she would occasionally ask for assistance or back-up. Now she was asking for outside help. He knew that the final destination had to be the solution to her problems, otherwise, she would never consider asking for anyone else's help, especially mages.

“Who is the mage that lives here, milady?”

“He calls himself Talis Riverwind. A moor who has somehow gained some sort of status.” She laughed at the mere notion of it.

“So you need his magic. I assume that this is going to mean we're extracting his magic?”

“If only I were so fortunate,” Gwen sighed. “But this is a magic that we have not encountered. He needs to remain in possession of his own magic. We can't take it from him.”

“You been asked to look for mages and NOT kill them?”

“Aye,” she replied almost hesitantly.

“Where be the fun in that?” he asked, sounding like a child who just had his sweets taken away. Gwen looked at Nemo and smiled amusingly. She couldn't blame him for his reaction. She had felt similarly. Both took great pleasure in subduing mages and taking away their power. It was the best way to take them on, but this expedition required different methods. After his small rant, Nemo leaned against the side of the ship and gazed out into London, the light of day just starting to die. “So what do you want me to do?”

“If you meet him before I do, tell him to find me.”

“Any particular place he should meet you?”

“He's a mage, Nemo. Furthermore, he's a seer. He can find me on his own.” She let out a low giggle to herself before taking a small huff. “Besides, what fun is it if you simply tell him where I am?”

“You've a point there, cap'n.” He smiled before pulling out a rusty dagger. “Usual method of delivering a message?” He let out a devilish laugh. Gwen turned to face him, staring hard at him with fiery golden eyes.

“No, Nemo. We need to build a trust in him. Diplomacy is needed, much as it will be difficult. Hopefully, he's not more trouble than he's worth.” She gripped the ship's edge tightly, thinking about the last few mages she had ever encountered. Every mage she has had to kill had given her such satisfaction and she reminisced each moment. Every expression on their face when they discovered their powers to be gone gave her pleasure. Every painful moment where a fireball had just barely missed her gave her resolve. She hated the targets, but always relished in

the hunt of things. She was doing a service, ridding these mages off the face of the earth. Knowing now that she had to keep these mages alive filled her with angst and doubt. How could she trust people that she has been killing off for so long?

“As you wish,” he spoke very sternly. Gwen recognized his tone. He was holding back fear. She couldn’t understand why until his hand touched the back of hers. Then she saw the blood on her fingertips. She had been clawing at the edge of the ship and left markings. All previous thoughts were sent to the back of her mind as she brought her hand to the rune stone around her neck. Isa, she remembered it being called. A silver marking painted on a black tourmaline stone. She closed her eyes and tried to control her breathing.

“No worries, Nemo,” she gasped. She looked out to the west as she gained the last of her composure. Nemo nodded. He had seen her act like this before and knew what this meant.

“Are you certain you can do this task?”

“Aye. I’ve been fine for these past moons. I believe I can do this without drawing too much attention, but I thank ye for the concern.” Nemo turned to her surprised to hear a comment like that out of her. She caught his glance for a split second before she turned towards her chambers and cleared her throat. “Shouldn’t you be out there with the rest of the lot?” Nemo sighed. He knew he wasn’t going to get anymore out of Gwen. She didn’t need to tell the crew much. Their own motivation was enough to do her bidding. But she usually gave a better idea of what she was getting them all into.

“I should. Meet back here at midnight, right?”

“Unless you meet Riverwind... or you hear me... then wait until dawn. Understood?”

“Aye, cap’n.” he replied as he prepared to step off onto the docks. He paused for a brief moment before turning back to his captain. ‘If I may ask, how are we gonna convince him to come along?’ A small sneer grew across Gwen’s face.

“Only one proper way to do it, Nemo...” she grinned. “Bribe them with knowledge...” Nemo’s face twisted into a quizzical look. His captain was becoming a lot more cryptic as of late. He wondered if it had anything to do with that woman she spoke to when they visited Venice. Before he could think about it anymore he shook his head and prepared to turn to the docks. “Oh, and Nemo, before I forget...” He turned back to her just in time to catch a small iron coin. Upon further inspection, he found it to be covered with silver runes that were arranged look like an eye. He looked to Gwen wondering what to do. “Slip that to him.”

Nemo let out a small grin. He knew what this was. “And if he finds it on him?”

“I expect him to,” she nearly purred with a sly smile. Nemo wanted to ask more questions, but she had already brushed him away once. He nodded to her and left for the docks. The rest of the crew was beckoning him to join in their debauchery. They would enjoy their precious moments on land. Nemo turned back to his captain and smiled. ‘Happy hunting, Gwen.’

“Same to you, Nemo.” She replied back to him. As Nemo rushed to join the last of his crew, she gazed out to look at her men. Scrapping, degenerate dogs, but they were loyal and reliable. They would not do anything she did not wish them to do.

“Remember,” she yelled after them, “unless you hear otherwise, meet here at midnight! Savvy?”

“Aye, cap’n,” they all barked back at her. Gwen let out a loud howl like a Spartan warrior.

“HAAAAOOOUU!” she howled.

“HAAAAOOOUU!” they howled back. Each one of them turned towards the city to savor their moments on land. She smiled after them. They’ve all earned it.

She gathered the remainder of her belongings, including her two pistols and cutlass as she prepared to step out onto the dock. The day was long gone and the air had chilled since they first arrived at the port. *Good*, she thought to herself. Her senses would be sharper. She was ready to hunt for this Talis Riverwind. Once she had him in her possession, she would hunt for the mage of the Lunar Tribe. She didn’t have much time. She looked up into the sky to see the half moon waxing. This task had to be completed by tonight. The sooner this was done, the better.

It had been a long time since her last encounter with a mage and this time she was ready. Pity she had to let the mages live. Her eyes glanced out into the night as every bone in her body quivered in anticipation. This new prey was going to be a challenge and she would make it a challenge for him. Before she stepped off the ships, she unbound the leather band on her right wrist and grazed her fingers over the ink that lay there: an upside down triangle with a crescent encased within. She remembered the woman who gave her that symbol and sighed heavily before taking that same hand and clutching her rune.

“This had better be worth it,” she thought to herself as she leapt off the ship and sauntered into London... The hunt was on.