

The Little Selkie Extra  
A Meeting of Merchants  
By K. M. Shea

When Dooley met Cagney, it was as if the universe had aligned to deliver to him his other half...but he was too stupid to notice.

“Dooley, this is our newest hire, Cagney. Her parents are our bookkeepers—you remember them—and her sister is an assistant in one of our Glenglassera stores,” Dooley’s mother, Lady Grania, said, putting her hands on the shoulders of a slight girl. “She’ll be helping her parents, for now.”

“Lord Dooley,” the girl said, bowing gravely. Although she couldn’t have been over fifteen, she had the mannerisms of a grand-matron. Her hair was pulled back in a tight bun; her dress—simple but spotless and wrinkle free—was dark in color, and her face was smooth with forced serenity.

All in all, she looked like a bore—a smart one, but still a bore.

“I am pleased beyond reason to make your acquaintance, Miss Cagney,” Lord Dooley said. He swiped her hand and pressed his lips to her palm, earning him a smack upside the head from his mother.

“Don’t harass the help, dear, or no one will work for us,” she said, eyeing her son. She turned her bland but crafty gaze upon Cagney and smiled. “Please, do not hesitate to use bodily force against our son if such a need arises.”

“Yes, my lady,” Cagney said, her voice as serene as her face. “If you’ll excuse me.” She bowed again before cutting a path through the crates and barrels that filled the warehouse.

“Quiet little thing, is she?” Dooley asked.

“Yes, but she’s smart. After a year of apprenticing with her parents, I am hopeful she can be trained for additional responsibilities,” his mother said.

“Poor thing,” Dooley said.

“In any case, you can expect to see her around. Watch your step with her—she has all the sensibilities you were born without,” Lady Grania warned.

“Your compliment warms my soul, angel among mothers.”

“I have cargo to inspect—but your father wants to speak with you.”

“It is such a shame, then, that I have a previous engagement with Cal,” Dooley said with a winning smile.

His mother gave him the look—a cross of disbelief and frustration.

“You know, Prince Callan? Ringsted’s future king?” Dooley helpfully added.

Lady Grania pinched the bridge of her nose. “You’ll be attending tonight’s dinner party, then.”

“Oh, no. I couldn’t possibly. I’m sure I’ll be positively exhausted from my romp with Cal. I simply—”

“If you’re not there, I will confiscate all your horses and export them to Torrens,” Lady Grania said.

“Fine,” Dooley sighed in aggravation. “But I shan’t enjoy it.”

“That would be too much to ask,” Lady Grania grunted. “Take care.”

“You as well, mother of mine.”

Dooley gave the uptight new employee—who was going over the contents of a crate—an amused glance before he fled the room, happy to get out of another afternoon of work.



“Lord Dooley. Sir, Sir?” Cagney said.

Dooley kept his eyes clamped shut, faking sleep in his office/prison.

Cagney tapped her foot twice before she left the room, closing the door behind her.

Although she had only worked with White Sands Trading Company for a few months, she was already well versed in bookkeeping. His parents now had her apprenticing with their personal assistants. Unfortunately, as she was new and young—even if a bit severe—his parents’ shrewd assistants usually sent her to try and prod Dooley into doing work.

“It won’t work,” Dooley said, popping his eyes open and stretching. “Even if she is a young lady. Merchant work is so *boring*.” He idly traced a ship’s path on a giant map that was spread across his desk.

Footsteps echoed in the hallway, moving back towards his desk. Dooley quickly adopted a sleeping pose and closed his eyes.

The door opened, and light footfalls crossed his desk before a tray jostled as it was set on his desk.

In mere seconds, a rancid, sour scent hit Dooley like a wall. “Land’s sake, what is that?” Dooley uttered, snapping out of his fake sleep to clasp a hand over his nose.

“Blu Cheese, from Loire,” Cagney said, making a note on a paper she held. She wore a silk scarf over her nose and mouth and seemed unbothered by the scent. “I’m glad you have awakened. I have several questions for you, sir.”

“Good gads, can’t we dump the cheese first?” Dooley asked.

“No,” Cagney said, her voice flat.

“Why not?”

“Your parents would like your input. They have recently imported blu cheese from Loire—a luxury, I am told. As it has sold quite well in Ringsted, they have plans to purchase a second shipment.”

“An entire shipment of spoiled cheese? Are they mad?” Dooley groaned. The cheese smelled like curdled milk that had been left out in the sun. It was *terrible!*

“They wish to know what you believe they should export to Loire. They cannot send the ship empty to pick up the cheese—it would be a waste of resources,” Cagney said.

“I don’t care—send fish.”

“Preserved or fresh?”

“Fresh!”

“Fresh fish would not survive the voyage as it must be consumed shortly after being caught.”

“Then preserved!”

“While Loire does not have a large fishing industry due to the fact that it has only one port, Loire trades with Arcainia for preserved fish. One lone shipment of Ringsted fish will not be able to crack a market Arcainia has dominated for decades.”

“Just tell my parents I don’t know, and they, in their abundant wisdom and knowledge, should make the choice themselves,” Dooley said.

“That would not be appropriate, sir. They are requesting your input because they wish for you to be more involved in the trading process,” Cagney said.

“I see. If that’s the case...you seem to know what to send. Why don’t you make the recommendation in my name?” Dooley asked.

“I cannot, Sir,” Cagney said.

Dooley grimaced as he realized the blue cheese sported actual *mold*. “And why can’t you do that?”

“Because I am certain you know the correct answer, you merely find the process too boring to interest you,” Cagney said.

Dooley tore his eyes from the moldy cheese and stared at Cagney. The young lady wore an expression of toleration. She wasn’t attempting to toady up to him—the rich heir of a merchant lord—nor did she despise him for his act. She merely saw through it and demanded that he push it aside.

Dooley tapped his fingers on his desk. “Tell them to take a shipment of hazelnuts to Baris and purchase silks there before continuing north to Loire.”

“Very good, sir,” Cagney said. She nodded once and left, closing the door behind her.

It took Dooley several seconds to realize the girl left the tray of moldy cheese. *That girl*, Dooley thought, smiling at her daring. *She has hidden fire. I like that.*



“Lord Dooley? Sir, I know you are awake.”

Dooley kept his breathing deep and even.

Cagney sighed, her footsteps signaling her retreat before the door opened and closed.

Dooley opened his eyes and looked to the door. He was shocked to see Cagney was still there, holding a pile of papers.

“Good, you’re awake,” she said with no conviction. “You must read these contracts and initial every page.” She put her armload of papers on her desk.

“That’s a small book,” Dooley complained.

“Yes, and I suggest you *carefully* read it. Your mother wrote a clause that will apprentice you to a fire dancer in Baris. If you don’t find the clause and accidentally initial it, you will be indentured.”

“Would you miss me dearly, darling Cagney?”

Cagney’s forehead wrinkled as she suppressed a scowl. “I am not your darling.”

“Your words wound me.”

“Good luck, Sir.” Cagney made a swift retreat before Dooley could get another word out.

Dooley shook his head at the girl’s cunning and reluctantly focused his attention on his papers. His mother found him, three hours later, still going over the contracts.

“What do you think?” she asked.

“I still haven’t found the clause that auctions me off to the fire dancer, and that worries me, but the agreement with Erlauf is interesting. The contract with that inner-land shipping company in Mullberg could use some work, though,” Dooley said. He didn’t look up from his work, but shuffled through the papers to hand his mother the Mullberg contract.

“Fire dancer clause? What are you talking about?”

“Cagney said you have a clause tucked into one of these contracts that indentures me to a fire dancer in Baris, and if I don’t find it, I’ll have to leave,” Dooley said.

Lady Grania laughed.

Dooley leaned back in his chair. “What?”

“I did no such thing—although it isn’t a bad idea. That girl, she is brilliant,” Lady Grania said, shaking her head when her mirth subsided.

“You mean there is no such clause?”

“No.”

Dooley tapped his fingers on his desk.

“I’m impressed she got you to so thoroughly inspect your work. Your father and I will give the Mullberg agreement another look,” Lady Grania said as she moved towards the door.

“Mother?”

“Yes?”

“Do you remember our conversation from last week?”

“I am not going to start a school for bards, Dooley.”

“No, not that one. The one in which you mentioned I should have a personal assistant, too.”

“Ahh, yes. What was it you said again? You couldn’t possibly handle the responsibility of another life depending upon you. That is quite melodramatic—even for you.”

“Yes, I’ve changed my mind.”

“Oh?”

“Indeed. I have become enlightened. I believe I do need a personal assistant.”

“I suspect you have someone in mind?”

“Indeed. Cagney,” Dooley grinned.

Lady Grania stared at her son. “You can’t dally with her.”

“I don’t intend to. I merely think she’ll be great fun.”

“She’s a good employee.”

“Don’t I deserve the best?”

Lady Grania sighed. “If you scare her off, your father will be upset.”

“I shall treat her with kid gloves. Only, Mother?”

“Yes?”

“Don’t tell her I requested her.”

“Why?”

“She’ll never agree to it.”

Lady Grania nodded. “You are right—but she would not refuse your father and me. Very well, I shall speak to her about it. But why her?”

“She’s interesting. There’s very little I find interesting about this business, but she’s...different.”

“You mean she has a good head on her shoulders and isn’t impressed with your flowery speeches. It’s just as well; we were planning to bring her deeper into the company. When you inherit it, she’ll make a fine advisor,” Lady Grania said.

“But of course. Thank you, dearest mother of the twinkling seas.”

“You watch your mouth with Cagney, or *you’ll* be twinkling,” Lady Grania warned before she left the room, her skirts sweeping behind her like the sails of a ship.

Dooley chuckled, hardly able to contain his glee. “Such a serious little bird. She’ll be fun to play with.”



Playing proved to be a word completely unknown to Cagney, and under her thumb, Dooley had very little of it as well.

“Dooley, you’re here a second night in a row—good gads, what are you wearing?” Callan asked, recoiling when he took in Dooley’s canary yellow waistcoat.

“I decided that if I must attend these horrid functions, I can at least allow myself a spot of fun,” Dooley said, preening.

“Cagney will scalp you when she finds out,” Callan said. He benevolently acknowledged a servant with a smile. Lord and ladies bustled around them in fine silk clothes of demure colors, making Dooley stick out like a black sheep. The ballroom of the royal palace was packed, and the air was hot and sticky.

“Yes, but only after she threatens me for leaving the party early,” Dooley said, adjusting the neck of his shirt.

“Early? Are you trying to anger her?” Callan asked.

“Of a sort. I’m hoping to bargain with her,” Dooley said.

“For what?”

“I’m not entirely certain.”

Callan clasped his arm. “You had better make up your mind soon, or your pain in facing her wrath will be for nothing.”

“Aye, I know. Are you ready for your voyage?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” Callan said, taking a flute of Champaign from a servant. “The unpredictable weather has Mother fretting, but I’m sure we’ll make it through.”

Dooley also took a flute and used it to gesture at his long-time friend. “To safety as we both face danger.”

“To safety,” Callan agreed. “Although your danger is entirely of your own making.”



Dooley watched Cagney fiddle with the pitcher of water and glass, arranging them perfectly and filling the glass exactly half full.

He shifted his attention from his personal assistant to his best friend, who lay pale but alive on a bed.

“He shouldn’t have made it through that storm,” Cagney said.

Dooley nodded. “Luck was with him.”

Cagney narrowed her eyes and studied the sleeping prince’s face. “He was found on shore, miles from the shipwreck. It was more than luck.”

“Perhaps,” Dooley acknowledged.

Cagney ran a hand over her hair—which was pulled back in its usual bun. Her expression was unreadable as she stared at the prince. “I’m glad he made it.”

“I am, too,” Dooley said, heaving himself out of his chair so he could stand at the prince’s bedside with Cagney. He slipped his arm over her shoulders, and for the first time since their acquaintance, she did not shrug him off or push him away. “Cal is a good prince, and an even better friend. It would be horrible...”

*She smells like nutmeg and cinnamon...* Dooley thought. Dooley discreetly shifted closer to Cagney, trying to catch a whiff of her hair.

“It’s been four days. I hope Queen Etain stops drugging him soon. He should be nearly better,” Cagney said, studying the prince—completely oblivious to Dooley’s inner musings.

“What?” Dooley asked, barely taking note of the conversation. *Is it her hair that smells that delicious? Hmm, I wonder what it feels like.*

“The prince. He sleeps all day because Queen Etain has ordered a sedative to be put in his food.”

“Of course,” Dooley said. He moved to nonchalantly brush Cagney’s hair. *Ahhh, as smooth as pearls.* He was more than a little sad when his personal assistant ducked out from under his arm.

“We had best leave. He is doing well and needs his rest—today, anyway.” Cagney twitched the water pitcher one last time before she bowed to the unconscious prince and swept from the room.

“Yes,” Dooley said, mindlessly trailing her. As they retreated from the palace, it hit Dooley like a thunderbolt. *I know what I want to bargain with her for.*

“Say, Cagney.”

“Yes?”

“Do you remember that luncheon you wanted me to attend?”

“The one Lord Padriac is throwing tomorrow before he heads back to his lands? Yes.”

“I’ll go...”

Cagney whipped around, her expression a comical mixture of shock and delight.

“If,” Dooley continued. “You attend with me, as my partner.”

“No,” Cagney said, her tone decisive.

“That’s too bad. You’ve broken my heart,” Dooley sighed. “I simply cannot go on.”

Cagney snorted.

“You have made me a shell of a man, pearl of my heart. I don’t think I can attend the meeting of the Glenglassera merchant guild next week.”

Cagney narrowed her eyes. “You wouldn’t.”

“I shall perish without you, my dove.”

Cagney scrunched her eyes shut, a grimace gliding over her face. “Fine,” she snarled. “But only this one time.”

Dooley smiled but said nothing in reply. Instead he walked side by side with Cagney. *It’s Cagney. It’s always been Cagney, I’ve just been too stupid to notice. I’ve already lost months—years even. But that’s alright. I will make her feel like the most cherished woman alive.*



“How go things with Cagney?” Callan asked, taking a sip of beer as the festivities in Easky began. “Any change?”

“No,” Dooley sighed. “I am beginning to fear she will never see me as a man.”

“She does. Your trouble is that she also sees you as her employer,” Callan said. “She’s so business-minded. I’m not sure you’ll ever get her to make the switch.”

“Thank you for the encouragement, dearest prince,” Dooley said, clenching his teeth.

“Chin up. At least you’re in good company,” Callan sighed.

“Still losing sleep over that mysterious girl who saved you?” Dooley asked.

“Yes, and no. I’ll never find her. It would take an act of magic to bring her back into my path,” Callan said, finishing his drink.

“Take courage. Perhaps you’ll nearly drown again, and she will rescue you a second time. Do you fancy going to face a storm in a row boat?” Dooley asked.

Callan frowned at his friend. “Feeling crabby tonight, are we?”

“She doesn’t see me, Cal, and I’ve dragged her to almost every luncheon and dinner party I’ve been invited to as my personal guest for two years. Considering how brilliant she is, I don’t think she can miss the meanings of my actions. Which means she is *purposely* ignoring my feelings,” Dooley said.

“Aren’t we a pair,” Callan said, shaking his head.

“What are best friends for?” Dooley laughed.

A slight smirk curled Callan’s lips, but it dropped from his face when he looked across the crowd. “Lady Aisling is here.”

“Ah, yes, I see the self-proclaimed beauty of Ringsted. It appears she is trying to work her way over here,” Dooley said.

“I fear you’re right. It’s too bad; I suddenly have a great desire to dance. I’ll see you later?”

“Of course,” Dooley said.

Callan slapped him on the back before hurrying to the dance floor—boards of wood raised several inches off the ground.

Dooley watched—greatly amused—as Lady Aisling pouted and returned to her friends. Callan had chosen his location well. Lady Aisling thought the dances the commoners performed were “beneath” her.

“You seem to have recovered quickly from the long ride from Glenglassera to the Summer Palace,” Cagney said, startling Dooley with her sudden appearance.

*Did she overhear our conversation?* “Pearl of my soul, it is only because you are with me that I survived the arduous journey.”

“You sat in a carriage after a day of riding. How arduous could it have been?” Cagney sourly asked.

“It was miserable as long as I was parted from you, my gem,” Dooley sighed. *Please, please hear the truth of my words...*

Cagney gave him a look of distaste. “Retire at a reasonable hour. You *must* attend the marina opening tomorrow.”

“I know,” Dooley said, smiling wryly. “Wait, retire? Why are you speaking of retiring at such an early hour?”

“I’m leaving. I have reports to unpack and some instructions and requests from your parents that I need to read over,” Cagney said.

“I’ll come with and help you,” Dooley said, offering her his arm.

Cagney suspiciously took his offered arm. “Why?”

“Why? What reason do I need besides bathing in your presence, Jewel of—”

“Forget I asked,” Cagney said. “Very well. I will accept your assistance. Will you tell the prince you are leaving?”

Dooley looked over his shoulder. The prince was dragging a tall, bronze-skinned and dark-haired young lady to the dance floor. “No, I believe he is preoccupied. Let us make our departure, my lady.”

Cagney sighed. “I wish you wouldn’t be so silly,” she muttered as they made their way through the village, strolling in the direction of the beautiful palace.



*That’s it. Callan has his happily ever after, and he had to find a selkie. I’ve chased after Cagney for years, and I’m no closer to winning her over than I was the day I first met her. Well, maybe a little. She has softened, some. But I won’t accomplish my goal anytime soon, if ever.*

Dooley shifted his gaze from his best friend and his wife—the lovely Princess Dylan of the selkies—to the object of his desire.

“What do you want?” Cagney impatiently asked, looking up from the spices she was inspecting.

It was over a year ago that Dylan had first crashed into their lives, and months had passed since the wedding, but the citizens of Ringsted were still enthusiastically rejoicing at having a princess who could control water. As such, the pair was enjoying unheard of popularity with much of the populace, making outings with them amusing and crowded.

Here it was a little better, in northern market of Glenglassera, as it was a merchant market only—common folk didn’t often venture to the area.

Dooley looked back and forth between Cagney and his friends before he announced, “I want that.” He pointed to Dylan and Callan.

Cagney squinted and watched Dylan eat grilled squid. “You want food?”

“No. I want what they have.”

“A better sense of fashion?”

“Cagney.”

The young lady tilted her head and studied Dooley with narrowed eyes. “You’ll have to speak plainly, Dooley. I cannot read your mind.”

“I have spoken plainly!” Dooley said. “I have bought you jewels and dresses. I have called you by every pet name imaginable. I attend *parties* for you, and I do actual *work* for you.”

“You should do your work anyway.”

“Cagney,” Dooley repeated, his voice lacking mirth. He sighed. “Can’t you at least tell me if I’m wasting my time? Is there any hope for us?”

“Us?” Cagney said. “Are you mad? Of course there isn’t! I’m the daughter of the bookkeepers for *your* company! I am your personal assistant! A relationship would be wildly inappropriate.”

“Fine. You’re fired,” Dooley said.

“What? You can’t just fire me!”

“I can, and I did.”

The spice merchant whose wares Cagney had been inspecting shifted awkwardly, looking as if he wished he were a thousand miles away.

“I’m a merchant heir, Cagney. I don’t care; my parents won’t care—actually, they’d be delighted; *no one* will care what your station was. Besides, your parents are wonderful people. You should be proud to be their daughter.”

“Perhaps, but you are also a *lord*,” Cagney said.

“Pft,” Dooley snorted.

“Don’t ‘pft me’,” Cagney snarled.

“Cagney, I *love* you. Don’t you think I love you passionately enough to get us beyond all of that?”

Something like fear flickered across Cagney’s face.

“Don’t you trust me?” Dooley asked.

Cagney looked down.

Dooley slid his hand under her chin and forced her to look up at him. “What do I have to say? What must I do so you will believe me when I say I love you?”

Cagney rapidly blinked, her eyes shiny with unshed tears. Dooley released her chin and slipped his arms around her, pulling her into a tight hug. “You are worth more to me than any title or company. But how do you feel about me?”

Cagney muttered into Dooley’s chest. “It’s inappropriate.”

“It’s *love*.”

Cagney gripped Dooley’s purple waistcoat. “This would be a lot more romantic if you weren’t dressed like a plum.”

“If that’s what it takes, I will dress properly. Would you marry me then?” Dooley asked.

“No,” Cagney sourly said.

Dooley felt as if a knife had struck his heart. He woodenly released her and backed up a step.

“No,” Cagney repeated, her voice less acidic. “It’s you—all of you, your bad fashion sense included—that I, I…” She tried again. “That I… I lo…”

“Yes?” Dooley prodded, hope lifting his shoulders. “Here, I’ll say it first, again. I love you, Cagney.”

Dooley waited with baited breath for Cagney’s response.

“And I l-love you, Dooley,” Cagney said in a small voice.

Dooley pulled Cagney to him to kiss her soundly. “You love me!” he laughed when they parted.

“I won’t for very long if you make a spectacle of us.”

“Callan, Dylan—Cagney said she loves me!”

“Don’t announce it to all of Glenglassera,” Cagney hissed.

“Congratulations to the happy couple! May your marriage be happy and fragrant as spices!” the spice merchant said.

“Hear, hear! May your relationship be as solid as a Ringsted ship!” another merchant shouted.

“Thank you,” Dooley beamed.

“Congratulations, my friends. I am so happy for both of you,” Callan said, his smile small but genuine.

“It’s about time,” Dylan said. “Will your wedding be pearl-themed? I can dive and get you some.”

“No,” Cagney said, her eyes widening.

“Absolutely. I will spare no expense for the Pearl of my life!” Dooley declared, kissing Cagney’s temple.

“You wouldn’t,” Cagney said, twisting to look up at him.

Dooley grinned and leaned over to kiss her again. “Always.”

The End