

Worthy

By Amelia Vestby

The wall in front of me stained red when I punched it. My teeth were clenched so hard it felt as if they would break from the pressure of my anger. Rejection was all I could see for miles. They didn't accept lasses; it was complete balderdash. Spitting in their faces was so tempting, but I knew that it would get me killed. And so I spilled my feelings onto the wall.

My seat in the tavern remained empty, calling me to come back. Laughs scattered their way across the room, drifting between drunk lads and scantily dressed lasses. I scoffed and finished my drink. A waitress brought ale and joined me at the table, fluffing her partially unbuttoned dress as she sat.

The blood from my knuckles dripped onto the table. "You know, there's a lad that may let you join his crew." She pointed across the room at a man with a full beard and a hat. "Go talk to him while he's still groggy."

Walking with great strides, it wasn't long before the strangers were staring me in the face.

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After flashing my hands they still didn't show any sign of intimidation. It was a rare sight for a woman to have scars or blood laying upon her skin, but that was a life I was willing to live. No man would want a lass like me with blemished skin.

Placing the ale in front of the captain I looked him in the eye. "There's word your healer died."

"Yes, I'm sure that word has gotten around already."

"I want to join your crew." He ignored my request but took the drink. "The name's Lydia Kimpton. I'm a healer." The pirate continued his act, calling a lady over for entertainment, turning his attention away from me.

"You won't survive for long without someone to take care of the sick and injured."

He laughed at my proposal, trying to hide his desperation. "You'll have to dress like a man, and from now on your name is Louis Kimpton. Be on my ship at dawn."

I nodded and turned to leave.

“Oh, and one more thing.” He threw a punch that left me on the floor. “Now you look more like a pirate.”

My lip ached, the pain matching the stinging of my hands. After stealing clothes from a passed out lad, I definitely looked the part, covered in dirt and dried blood. There was no way anyone would suspect my gender now.

Most would think my stories were destined to be lost at sea, and maybe they are. But while most wanted the safety of work and a family, uncertainty was something I craved. It was taken as delusion by others, but being on the sea, to me, is freedom.

As we left harbour the sun crept out, painting colors across the sky. It was the start of a new journey, and we floated into the unknown. The rocking of the ship was unfamiliar. The hard ground was miles beneath me and the thought was unsettling. It felt as if we were floating freely in the sky with the birds. I didn't know how to man a ship, though my healing would come in handy. The cold air bit at my skin as I watched the horizon now made of blue waves.

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It wasn't long before the captain threw me under the deck to begin my duties. I waited for someone to come, screaming in pain, begging to be healed. Water dripped from the ceiling; the constant dampness was impossible to avoid. Fortunately, my bed was dry, a pleasant contrast to the moist air and wet floor. As the journey carried on, the yells became familiar and at night, the quiet crash of the waves was easy to fall asleep to.

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A door slammed and my eyes jerked open. Beams of sun shone into my room. I followed a lad who took me to a crew member with a gash along his leg; an easy fix. He laid on the floor and I sewed him up. Blood stained the wood like I've seen many times before. It was disgusting. The smell of iron now lingered in the air. Dark red spots were all over the dock, showing this has happened before, giving the ship a worn look.

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The men were smart; it didn't take long before they figured out my secret. All I had to do was open my mouth and the voice gave it away.

“She’s a lass!” One yelled.

“No, She’s a witch!” They started to bicker.

“I’m not a witch!” I responded, fighting the urge to spit.

“Of course you are. Look at you, wragged and boney, scratches covering your hands. Do you have a husband?”

I shook my head. He turned to the rest of the men.

“See she’s alone and doesn’t act like a proper lady.” Then back to me, “The fact that you’re so young and a healer just gives it away!”

“Enough!” I grabbed a pistol from the lad in front of me and shot it into the air, praying it didn’t hit anyone. “My father is a healer, I’ve grown up around it, that’s how I know. My family was going to force me to marry, so I ran.”

“We should throw her over before something happens.” He grabbed his pistol back from my scarred hands.

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Luckily, one lad spoke up, “No, we need a healer or we may see a worse fate.”

Now the whole ship knew about me. I was terrified about what they might do, but fortunately I was too valuable to get rid of. While there were some that protested, most agreed to let me stay, though I was treated as lower class, as if I were something unworthy of being there living on the sea.

Men were like leeches. The only lass on board was a dangerous role to play. I headed to the kitchen for food, grabbing an apple, the only thing we were allowed to have at dawn. Picking up a bucket filled with salt water, I snuck through the halls to the bloody floor. A tall lad followed my steps, my heart started to race and there was no mistaking his intention.

He pushed me up against the wall restricting me from any escape. I screamed and thrashed, hitting him with my fists as he turned me around. A hand brushed down my waist while the other was holding my arms high above my head. I kicked hard, and he loosened his grip just long enough for me to twist around and push him into the wall. My

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heart was beating so fast I was ready to faint. The blade in my pocket was easily accessible. My lips touched his, but it was a distraction. I gripped the blade and stabbed upward, into the kidney, twisting the knife around as he sunk to the floor. He stopped moving after a minute.

It was tempting to throw the blade into the ocean so no one could seek revenge for their friend, but I kept it instead. The blade was a symbol, something that reminded me of my strength. The body was heavy on my shoulders as I climbed the ladder onto deck where the crew worked. It wasn't hard to gain everyone's attention, I threw the corpse, it hit the wooden floor with a heavy thud. A look I hadn't seen before lingered in the men's eyes. They didn't see a little girl anymore, but instead saw me as an equal, they saw me as worthy.