

Crimson Waters

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*She had always
belonged to the sea.*

(Long before she'd fallen beneath the waves, ice and salt filling her fragile lungs, the claws of the depths tangling her hair, her clothes, dragging her deeper and deeper into the dark. Yes... she had always been chained to the sea.)

She loved it as a child. Howled with laughter, uncaring of who heard as she played a game of chase with the tide, sand sticking to the bottoms of her small feet. The cool water lapping at the bottoms of her dresses, weighing her down, tempting her mind with thoughts of casting herself out into the endless sea to play forever and seek brilliant treasures, to swim and grow gills. But that bubble of childish delight was always broken by the calls of her parents.

She loved the water as a young adult. That precious time when her mind was struck by swirling emotions, when she was tripping over her long limbs. No longer a child but not yet a woman. A time when she'd sneak from her windows in the middle

of the night until her mind was soothed by the gentle swaying song of the waves.

That time when she met him. A sailor boy with sun-kissed skin and rough hands, his face forever stretched by a warm smile. A boy who tasted of saltwater and sunlight. A boy who told her glorious tales of faraway places, wild storms, and the glimmer of vibrant fish scales beneath that expanse of blue.

And when she finally became a lovely woman, she succumbed to that siren call. She spent her days aboard her lover's vessel and fell even further in love with the sea. She spent her days under the sun, dancing along the deck as she pulled and knotted the ropes, hauled supplies, and handed out the crewmen's meals. All the while her voice

rising and falling in song, warming the hearts of her fellow sailors as they traveled. And when night fell, the constant roar of the water combined with the gentle rock of the boat made going to sleep easy.

*But in her ignorance,
in her unlimited trust
of the sea, she forgot
how dangerous water
could be.*

She forgot the tales of wretched storms and lost ships, the stories of men dragged beneath the waves. She thought herself exempt from the dangers. Until one day, months into the ship's voyage, far from any sighting of land, the sea's fabled temper reared its ugly head and threatened to send the ship and her crew down into the unforgiving waters.

Boom . . . crack went the beastly storm. Lightning burst across the swirling sky. The storm dared for someone to test it, to try to weather its temper. The storm roared, pacing the length of the horizon like a caged

animal, jaws of white foam and dark water battering against the ship's walls. Rain poured from the heavens, splattering and freezing against the worn wood under the frigid wind.

The Captain screamed against the sound, barking orders down the line. "This crew and ship will not sink," he swore as he glared up into the sky. "Not as long as I stand and draw breath!"

But while the Captain's words raised the hopes of his men, they did little to quell the heavy silent fear that filled her chest. The woman who loved the sea stood shivering, face pale, stared out into the vast nothing, and thought, *We are never getting back to shore.*

Dressed only in her nightgown and her beloved's coat, the woman stumbled along the edges of the ship, nails clawing at the wood to avoid slipping, careful not to get in the crew's way. She had never faced a storm before, especially not one of this magnitude, and understood she would be of little to no help. But she was loath to go back below deck, at the very least, not without her beloved.

She blinked. The raging storm poured water down her face. She sputtered, finding it difficult to get a full breath under the spray. It felt like such a betrayal for the sea to bash and pull at the ship, for the threat of drowning to be so close.

*This was her sea,
her darling blue
expanse, and it had
never come close to
harming her before.*

Yet she felt so afraid. So very afraid of her eternal companion. She didn't feel at home here, despite being surrounded by water. She felt only dread, only the breath of death on her neck as she stared out across the water that had, only a few hours ago, been home.

She wanted her lover, wanted her sailor boy to hold her and tell her everything would be alright, even though, deep down, she knew it would not.

Finally, she spotted that sun-kissed skin, those bright eyes, but she found no familiar smile on his lips. It seems the storm had taken even his optimism and light. Her lover shuddered, chilled to the bone, and with gritted teeth, pulled harder on his ropes. The crew fought to stay afloat, already having given up on staying on course and now only sought to avoid watery graves.

Boom . . . crash, the storm howled, and under a flash of light, the crew saw the edge of the Reaper's scythe rise up in the form of a

massive tidal wave that would tip the scales in the storm's favor.

The men screamed, and she, tears drowned out by the spray, pressed her lips to her those of her lover. She stole his last breath as the wave fell upon them.

*She had always
belonged to the sea.
Always knew that
one day she would
slip into that blue
expanse and never
resurface.*

She knew this long before that wave fell and ripped her away from her lover, long before her lungs were filled with ice and saltwater. She struggled, but it did not take long for the darkness to swallow her.

She had always been chained to the sea, and in her blind love, she had forgotten that the sea is not always kind to its devotees. ❀