

It was the night Julie put a dead nun in my bed, set fire to her, and burned down the convent, killing everyone inside. She told me: “When they pull that body from your bed, and it’s nothing but ash, they’ll think it’s you, and you can live the life you want.” And I guess she was right because no one has bothered me since. She called it “An act of love,” and I don’t doubt it because I know what it cost her, which is damn near everything, when, three months later, they sentenced her to death.

I heard she fled to Marseille soon after, where she tried to board a ship to England. It was a stormy day, and the sea threw up briney spindrifts: the kind of day most people stayed inside. But Julie hadn’t rested a day since freeing me, so she went from ship to ship, searching for a captain who could give her safe passage, but of which there was only one — a godly captain called Tobias "Toby" Marlowe.

He stood at the end of a gangplank, a large sailing ship behind him and a filthy huddle of crew nearby. This was strange to Julie, but not so strange that she daren’t approach him with an offer — a hundred gold coins for speedy passage.

“A lot of coin,” he said. And then: “Big sea today. I heard the sailing weather will be better tomorrow.”

“I’ll be dead by tomorrow,” said Julie.

“And we’ll all be dead if we sail on that ship.”

“Then I’ll pay you two hundred.”

He sighed and looked her in the eye. “Let me be clear, miss — there ain’t no amount of gold you could pay me to step aboard that ship.”

“I never thought I’d meet a captain too scared to sail his own ship.”

“My crew and I aren’t out here because we’re scared of the ship, nor the weather.” He glared at the empty deck behind him. “There’s something beastly in there, and it killed my men. No one believes us, and we’ve not gone back inside since, so here’s my offer — kill whatever haunts its hold, and I’ll take you wherever you want.”

“Deal,” said Julie and pulled a rapier from her waistband. “Whatever is inside, I’ll kill it.”

She pushed past him, but not before he gave her one last warning: “We won’t come in to help, even if you scream bloody murder.”

“Obviously,” she said and boarded the ship.

It was dark inside, and the floor was sticky with blood. Julie crept forward, deeper into the belly of the boat, unprepared for what lay below the waterline. And there, amidst the ballast and the seawater, she met her end.

When the soldiers found her, all that was left was her rapier sunk in bloody seawater. Dead, they said, just like all the others. And for a long time, I believed them. But then, last night, I saw the spitting image of her at my window, face pale as a sheet. So now? Now, I'm not so sure she's dead at all.