

The Rest Is Complicated

For years, my mother was obsessed with one thing, and one thing only: slaying The Kraken. It was something straight out of a fairy tale, something that was only ever talked about as legend from the older pirates when they had had too much to drink. Too often as a child I had heard the stories of a beast with massive tentacles covered in teeth, and how it could shred through ships like paper or swallow them whole depending on the beast's size in the stories. Something like killing The Kraken was silly to think about, crazy to theorize, and so far, impossible to do.

So, of course, everyone thought my mother was crazy when she said that she was going to kill the beast. Most doubted it was real, and those who believed it was real said that it just couldn't be done. The beast was massive, immune to swords, spears, arrows, and even cannons. It was said to appear out of nowhere, giving any ship that had been even a little close to it no chance of escape. As impossible as it may have seemed, my mother was determined; and in my opinion, crazy. That craziness is what kept her driven, no, kept her alive for the 16 years that I was alive, and I had learned to ignore all her stories and endless ranting about how she would end it some day, even if it was the last thing she did. To me, it seemed like killing the beast was the only thing she lived for, and I wondered what would happen to her if she did it. Would her adventurous pirate life end right then and there? Would she finally be done and go on living a normal life? Or would her madness drive her to a new target, something else impossible to spend her life focusing on trying to accomplish? Many times I had tried to ask her why she was so obsessed with the beast, what was driving her to devote her entire life to learning about it and searching the entire world in an attempt to find it. Every time I asked she would get quiet for a long time, her eyes looking far away into something I had no hopes of seeing.

Eventually, she would turn to me and say, "It just has to be done...", and would leave it

at that. So, deciding I had no reason to really argue with the person who was giving me a place to stay, and believing that she would never really find it, I just did whatever she asked. By no means did she spend a lot of time with me, but her voyages around the world gave her lots of supplies and little treasures to sell, so my allowance was usually a bit hefty. Rarely, did I ever question this life I lived. But, the impossible was rarely impossible, especially in the world that I lived in. People just liked to tell tall tales, and rarely did things live up to their reputations.

At the age of 16, I was responsible for killing not only my mother, but The Kraken she had so desperately dreamed of destroying with her own two hands. It had been an accident, a massive one to say the least. After years and years of voyaging all over the world, I should have guessed that believers of The Kraken would rally together at some point. I just never expected it to be under my mother, and I never expected that with all their resources combined they would actually be able to find the thing. Captain after captain pledged their allegiance to my mother, and they all brought their own things to the table, but the one thing that was the most common was pieces of the monster. Teeth, flesh, suction cups, proof to one man, fake to the other. It was through these items that my mother made something very simple: a bomb. A small one, nothing more than a few ounces of purple liquid in a flask, but something had been done to it. Something had been added to it to give it the power I saw that day. None of the crew members knew of this concoction that my mother had made, not even the other captains. She told all of them that she had a plan to kill The Kraken, and all they had to do was be in position, hold it still, and she would do the rest. The only reason I knew of this concoction was because I was her daughter, and I was the only person in the world she could rant to about these sorts of things.

The fateful day came when the captains of *The Kraken Hunters*, all 14 of them, had finally coordinated with my mother where the beast was going to appear. It was a week's travel for us to get there, and when we did, it was another two days before it showed itself. To a

degree, everyone there had believed in the monster, but in the back of their minds had slivers of doubt that had been sown in over the many years that they had been laughed at or ridiculed for following their captains. Now, as tendril after tendril exploded from the ocean; now, as a whirlpool of teeth had replaced the glittering sea that had been there only moments ago; now, face to face with a legend, every man, woman, and captain there believed every story they had ever heard about the creature. They all stood still, shocked to see that they had been right, and had to be shouted at to get moving again. My mother, however, had not skipped a beat. The Kraken had erupted from behind our ship, and my mother stood at the bridge, watching, waiting for all the other ships there to fasten their ropes around her very reason for existing.

Surprisingly enough, the beast was fastened, and I watched as all the other ships started to suffer from the strain. It was so large and so powerful that many of them took on some water whenever it struggled, yanking the deck into the ocean for the brief moment that it had its energy. My mother's ship, our ship, was the only ship to move any closer, and I felt my heart skip several beats as I watched us drift straight toward the serrated maws of death. Somewhere inside myself, I trusted my mother to kill this monstrosity. In fact, I knew that she could. She was crazy for sure, but she was no fool. No way in the locker did she plan all this and not have what it took to finally end this nightmarish legend. However, that trust I had was beginning to fade as I looked over the rails of our ship to see that one of The Kraken's tendrils had not been tied down according to plan. It was creeping up the side of our ship, slowly, carefully, knowing that if one of us noticed that would be the end of its plan of escape.

My first instinct was to shout, to scream, to get one of our crew members to fire a cannon at the beast or to signal for a neighboring ship to throw a spear into it and tie it down. But the constant bellowing that came from its jaws made it impossible for anyone to hear a word I was saying. When I look back on the noise The Kraken made now, I feel almost bad for it. It felt so deep and sad, but in the moment, in all the panic that everyone felt as they fought for their lives, it was nothing more than the mindless aching of a monster. I realized as it was

creeping up the side, closer and closer that it was nearing where my mother was. If she didn't notice, if she didn't act quickly, her story would come to an end before she could complete this dream of hers. So, without thinking I ran across the deck, dodging and weaving through our crew members who were chanting and shouting words of encouragement, up the stairs, and found my mother with the flask she had made in hand.

The tendril was almost on board when I arrived, and I shoved my mother out of the way just in time to avoid it slamming down on her. Our ship kept drifting closer. I turned to my mother and watched as she pulled herself to her feet, pushed me aside, and walked back to the edge of the bridge. Closer. I grabbed ahold of her, and she shouted something I couldn't make out before shaking me free. Even closer. Again I grabbed at her, only to get a hard punch in the gut that sent me reeling. Closer still. While on the deck I made one last grab at her ankle, which tripped her, and sent her sprawling backwards towards the railing. Right on the edge now. I was on my feet already, chasing after her, crying out for her as I did so. She slammed into the railing, went sprawling overboard, and right as I made it to the railing, my hands only grabbed for air, and I saw my mother as she met her end. Downwards she plummeted into the spiral of teeth, and I watched in horror as she was swallowed up. Whatever had been in that flask of hers did what it was supposed to do. The moment it came in contact with the contents of The Kraken's stomach, it exploded.

A large purplish flame erupted from the serrated hole in the ocean, and in an instant there was a deafening 'Pop!' that left me covered in guts. I stood, astonished, bewildered, shocked beyond belief as I was covered in a syrupy green blood, and everyone seemed to hold their breath for several moments after it happened. From that day forward, I was known as Krakenslayer Cordelia.

Eye-witness accounts report: "After witnessing her own mother get swallowed whole by The Kraken, Cordelia became enraged, and called upon a power from deep inside her. It was a power made from her mother's deepest wishes to slay the beast, and from the moment Cordelia

had been born, she knew this was her purpose. She cast her power on the beast, and in an instant it exploded, raining its guts down from the sky!’

Of course, only two pieces of that were true. My mother was swallowed whole, and guts rained down from the sky. The news spread like wildfire, and everywhere I went, I was credited with destroying the beast. Not a single soul doubted the story, for all everyone saw after The Kraken was slain was my mother missing, me with my hands over the edge of the ship grasping toward the beast, and a giant pool of green blood where The Kraken had once been. Inside myself, I wanted to deny the story, to come out and tell everyone the truth about what had happened that day. But then I would be called a coward for trying to stop my mother’s dream, and I would be called a monster for ultimately causing her demise. Rather than being famous, I could even be labeled a criminal, so I kept quiet, and suffered quietly whenever I heard my story being told at the tavern I just so happened to be visiting that night.

Three and a half years after killing The Kraken, I found myself sitting in a nice little tavern enjoying my dinner. It was here that I finally heard a story besides my own. I found myself listening more intently than I had ever listened to anything before. There was an old pirate, one with a big bloated belly, a thick, gnarly beard, more scars than I bothered to count, an eyepatch, and of course, a peg leg. He was the embodiment of every pirate storyteller ever, and I felt just as inclined to listen as the younger pirates and the children in the tavern gathered around to hear what was going to undoubtedly be another amazing story.

He cleared his throat, and all chatter in the room, all movement, even from the bartender, even from the waiters who had been bustling about stopped. All eyes were on him, and there was no atmosphere in the world that was more ripe for a good story. He spoke the first words, and I watched as some of the postures in the room shifted, some with recognition, others with excitement because there was no recognition to be had.

‘Today, I’ll tell ye the story of Jessie The Heartbroken. Hopefully, it’ll leave ye a bit heartbroken, too.’ He paused to take a long drink of whatever he had in his mug, making sure

his throat was well whetted to tell the tale. "Jessie had always been a girl for the sea. From the day she was born, she had been able to lay her eyes on the ocean, and she felt it in her bones that it was where she needed to be. Each day her parents would bring her down to the shore to let her play, to let her crawl about in the sand, to wiggle her wee toes in the foam of the sea water. It all brought a great big smile to the little lass's face, and whenever she was feelin' down, her parents always sent her to go take a gander at the sea.

"What no one understood was that wee Jessie didn't want to just enjoy the sight of the ocean, she wanted to be upon it. You all grew up hearing stories of pirates, didn't ye'? Well, Jessie was no different. She wanted to be a pirate, too, and the only thing that kept her from it were the blood that flowed within her. She be royal blood, and she knew her dreams of sailing the seas were far from possible. But we wouldn't have a very good story if she just gave up right then and there, now would we?' He paused, looking around the room. When he did, he caught my eye, recognized me, and only smiled at me when he did.

After all the children listening had nodded in agreement to his question, he continued. "So, poor lil' Jessie was stuck like this, an achin' in her bones that she could never satisfy, and it lasted till the day that she went from being a wee thing to a fine young lass. It just so happened that on her 17th birthday when her parents let her go to a festival by herself that just so happen to have some pirates passin' through. They seemed harmless enough, so the guards had no reason to stop 'em from buying some beer and participatin' in the local activities and whatnot. Jessie had bumped into the lot of them, and having always wanted to be a pirate like them, stuck around. She stuck around just long enough to meet their captain, and a few drinks later, long enough to be in love with their captain. He was a charming young man who went by the name Daniels back then. He swept her off her feet and made her feel like she was on top of the world, as if anything that he said was possible just because of the way he said it, all that sappy stuff.

"So, Jessie and Daniels started meetin' in secret every day since, and she was

convinced this was the man of her dreams. After all, he promised her again and again that he could take her to the sea, and all she had to do was go with him.’ The man sighed before continuing. “As you all know, following our dreams ain’t always that simple, and after spending too much time waiting for a foolish young girl to make up her mind, Daniels decided it was high time he left... or that’s what he would’ve done, if he hadn’t learned who the girl he was dealing with really was. She was Jessie, the princess of this land, and surely, her life was worth a pretty penny, wasn’t it?

“So, he told her to meet him at about ten pm sharp on that beach she had loved so much, and when she did, he was quick to get her all tied up and ready for bargaining. He sent a man to fetch the king and queen, demanding their presence to negotiate his terms. He wanted 100,000 golden pennies, and unfortunately, the king and queen didn’t have 100,000 golden pennies to give. Sure, they had wealth, but not that much wealth. In no way were they able to fork over that much money. And so, they turned away from their daughter, unable to watch what would become of her when they couldn’t pay for her release. In fact, the king and queen were more focused on trying to rally their armies to catch the pirates, but knew the efforts would be wasted. None of their ships were fit to catch a sailing ship like theirs, and no army would reach the beach in time to save poor Jessie. No soldier they brought with them that evening could have stood a chance against the firing squad of pirates waiting for the king or queen to make a wrong move.’

With great sorrow, the man continued on. “Jessie cried many tears as she watched the man she loved betray her, and sobbed to herself when her parents turned their backs on her. Shock exploded in her eyes when she felt a sword thrust through her chest, and looked up to see it was Daniels who had done it. There was no remorse in those eyes of his. He yanked the sword out and tossed it to the side, already heading back to his ship without a second thought.’ Many of the children watching were staring in disbelief, wondering how a story going this terribly

was even remotely supposed to turn out well for anyone. I found myself more drawn in than expected, and was waiting for the statement that would spin this story on its head. Surely, it came.

"But ya see, the thing about Jessie was, that all that sadness, that sorrow, that hurt, that achin' in her bones, in the last minutes of her life, those very last moments where she had to ponder it all as she lay in the sand, she felt it all turn into a scalding rage. It burned inside of her, red and hot, the angriest that she- nay, that any mortal on this earth had ever been. Because in that moment, it had occurred to her that she would never get to explore the sea, and it was only one man's fault: Daniels. Just moments after she passed, members of Daniels' crew had turned to face the sound of shuffling around in the sand. They all stood, horrified as Jessie-

"-as Jessie what? Rose from the dead? Tore her bindings free with fire that sprung forth from her soul? Took Daniels' sword, the very one he slew her with, and cut every one of his men's throats, before savin' him for last and plunging it right through his chest, aye?" The angry voice that had cut off the storyteller belonged to a woman, a tall woman with an eyepatch, long, flowing black hair, and a sword at her side.

The man looked bewildered, but tried to feign innocence. "J-Jessie! You came just in the nick of time! I was just telling my story about how uh... How Krakenslayer Cordelia had finished off the wicked beast, weren't I laddies?" His accent had dropped when he got startled.

Not a single soul in the tavern vouched for the man. I was more concerned with how Jessie had gotten into the room without anyone noticing. *Were we really that entranced in the story?*

"Uh huh, sure ya were, pal. I'm tellin' you for the last time, Scotty.' She reached in and grabbed the man by his beard. "Keep spreading my story around like you got some claim to it, and I'll make Daniels and his crew look like a joke, ye understand?"

Scotty nodded furiously, and Jessie stormed out of the tavern with a huff. I watched as

the crowd of children and young pirates scattered like roaches to a light, and Scotty began downing the rest of his drink like it might help him forget whatever horror it was he saw when he looked into Jessie's eye. I stood, and strode past him, following Jessie to the docks outside. It only took a moment to find her. She was sitting on a barrel, crossing something out on a map. I walked over, and I hadn't gotten to speak before she looked up and spoke first.

"Well well, if it ain't the living legend, The Krakenslayer.' She started off.

I was quick to retort. "Well well, if it ain't the dead one, The Heartbroken.'

"Ooh, as quick witted as they say you are. What can I help ya with, monster hunter?"

"Well, I... Heard the story in there and I just wanted to ask... Is it true? Did you really come back from the dead and slay Daniels and his crew? I mean, I've heard the story before, but not like that.' I spoke with sincerity and genuine wonder. I wanted to hear what another legend had to say for themselves.

"I mean, it's true that I was stabbed in the chest.' She opened her jacket for proof, and sure enough, clear as day was a scar that seemed like it had once been quite life threatening for her. "And it's true that Daniels and his crew are dead. The rest is a bit complicated. What about you? Did you really kill The Kraken, the million toothed beast with some dark magic after you saw your mother get eaten?"

"Well, it's true that I saw my mother get eaten, and it's true that The Kraken is dead, but the rest is a bit complicated.' I found myself smiling wide.

"I think you and I have a lot to talk about then, don't we?" She was smiling just as wide as I was.

"Yeah... I think we do."