

Voyage to the Edge

I should have listened to Julia. She warned me before I set off on this voyage that it could only end in tragedy. But I let my own pride and the greed of my crew steer my decision. Mother would be so disappointed. I can see it from the bow of the ship, the edge of the world.

I can hear my girls scramble behind me to turn the ship before we tip, but we all know the effort is futile. Our lookout noticed too late and the wind blowing us forward is too strong. The tempestuous waves are just knocking any progress they do make away.

We're close enough now that I can see the sun, still bleeding hot reds and beaming yellows, through heavy cloud cover. From my place at the edge of the ship I can hear my crew shouting to each other to brace. Any moment now the ship will take a dive over the drop into the abyss below.

My dear sister Julia, my poor, sickly mother, they'll never know what happened to any of us. It's an especially heartbreaking thought when remembering my father, lost at sea on a similar voyage after being separated from mother and their crew.

My feet slip from under me as the ship tilts forward and I feel weightless. I'm suspended, stomach dropping and breath catching. I watch the deck dip away, and catch sight of rushing water waiting to sweep me away. The world falls still, silent, and it's just me.

The feeling doesn't last. My ship rights itself enough to catch me before I can hit the water. The impact is jarring, it sends a sharp pain up my left leg into my head.

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When next I blink, the moon is hanging high and proud in the sky. I feel the slow, gentle rock of the boat under me, hear the waves lapping against the side and the groans of my crew as they too regain their bearings. It soothes me some to know that they managed to remain with the ship as well. Sitting up is difficult but possible. I ache from head to toe, my head and left leg particularly persistent in making a nuisance of themselves. Evidently, standing was not yet feasible.

Crawling to the edge of the ship I catch a glimpse of water swirled with soft golden hues, glowing silvery-blues, and lush greens so deep they look almost black. The rest of the world is washed in a spectrum of pale blues, shining white, and deep purples.

Trees ripe with fruit I've never seen and flowers more vibrant than any that grow back home. Even in the darkness of night, the opulence of the land and sea before me is awe inspiring. I turn to look back at the way we came, hoping to catch sight of the waterfall that dropped us and saw nothing but the river that carried us and glowing dots floating aimlessly about.

Bracing myself against the ship's flank, I stand to assess the damage done from the drop and attempt to gather my thoughts enough to drop anchor for the night in such an unfamiliar place. My vision spins and lights blur together. I sink back to sitting and close my eyes again. Still no standing then. Opening my eyes once more I elect to assess from my seat on the deck.

The sails are unsalvageable and the main mast has completely toppled. My crew is weather worn and shaken, looking about with awe.

At first they don't notice me slumped over at the rail, my first mate is the first to notice my half limp body leaning heavily when I do catch their eye. Her concern is tangible and quickly spreads as more take notice of my battered state.

Our resident medic rushes over and, with help, carries me over to the rest. Rebecca was our newest member, but extremely experienced in medicinal herbs and salves. I was laid out on the shredded sail and she examined me carefully before she went rushing below deck and returned minutes later with several glass jars, ceramic bowls, a mortar and pestle, and clean cloth strips in her arms.

I tried to wave off my crew's concern and have Rebecca treat their ailments first but she only shook her head and continued mixing various jars together.

Taking my stocking off, the glowing moonlight did little to hide the rapidly spreading bruise stretching from the top of my thigh to down near my ankle. A hiss to my left alerted me of Elizabeth's presence. As first mate, she took hold of the situation around us as Rebecca treated my leg, mumbling about the possibility of breaks.

Elizabeth delegated jobs to those well enough to do them. Some were to climb below deck and check our reserves and supplies while others were sent in smaller vessels to scout an area for us to dock and set up camp. The remaining few were instructed to assist our medic with the injured or were the injured.

My head wound was next, Rebecca carefully moving my hair about before finding the tender spot, her hand coming away dark. I hadn't noticed the blood. She quickly wiped the spot with a rag before applying a thick layer of salve, wrapping some pieces of cloth over it.

When at last Rebecca and those assisting her were finished with us, Elizabeth had come back to tell me that our scouts had found a small alcove in the trees not far from where the main vessel was floating along. There was plenty of fruit and other potentially nonpoisonous vegetation in the surrounding area, all we had to do was hike our way to it through the forest. I told Elizabeth to gather the people that were above deck and send them in small groups of four or five at a time, at least one injured person to each group. I sent Rebecca off to the innards of the ship to inform the crew still below deck. She had a few of them help her carry medical supplies while the rest gathered food, clothing, and other valuables and necessities.

Elizabeth helps me hobble to my private quarters, over to the large chest that still sits in the corner. Kneeling and slipping the key into the lock, I press the lid open and peer inside. I drag several changes of clothing out as well as my rapier and pistol, before digging a small, carved wooden box out of the bottom, buried under scrolls and maps and other things shoved in there over time.

Grabbing a satchel and my belt to hold the sword and gun, I shuffle back out onto the main deck with Elizabeth, where one of the last groups is about to depart. Several crewmates help me down onto the row boat, and Elizabeth hops down after confirming no one remains on board.

As we start to row toward shore, I turn, taking one last look at the remains of my beloved ship. It continues lazily bobbing with the river's current, unmoored. Shortly, we'll reach the banks and flip the boat to carry it inland, the waters too shallow to ride

further. The ship will continue downstream, wherever that leads, and I can only pray that we'll find each other again.