

~ A Scavenger's Love Song ~

by K. Alexander

NO WARNINGS, NO COMMENTS, NO ANYTHING except for a nice dose of escapism. Even angst needs a holiday. Find me at: kalex@webmail.co.za

The year is 1718. It is a beautiful day and I stand at the stern of my ship as we cleave through the water. The wind whips my hair about and throws the salty spray in my face, and up above, unfurling sails and winding rope, my men just shake their heads and smile when they hear me roar with joy. The Jolly Roger is flying today, and if the sight of that flag spinning in the wind does not terrify my adversaries, then I most certainly will.

Today I am encased to the knee in my snug black boots, well-worn and soft from constant usage. My brown leather pants have softened too and moulds to me now like a second skin. The white cotton shirt billows in the wind, neatly tucked into the pants at the waist but not buttoned. I don't bother with my undershirt anymore. The men know what I am and they have seen plenty of what I possess. The last one to appreciate my assets a little too much ended up at the bottom of the Indian Ocean lacking some of his body parts. Nobody wishes to join him. I own this vessel, I own these men, and they know me beyond what a woman is supposed to be. I am strong; my arms are like cables of steel from carrying and lifting right there along with them. My tongue and my mind are like steel also. I have honed them on battles won and lost, mind-games with admirals so fixated upon my body that i have taken it all in front of their very eyes. The sabre strapped to my side with its vivid crimson sash, the knife concealed at my thigh - all of these weapons I have killed with. No, these men know what i am. They will pay homage to me as long as I wish it. Late afternoon, and the sun is moving lower in the sky. Although it is still hot, I can feel the coming chill of night somewhere in the air. With one browned hand I gather my flaming hair and tie most of it into a loose tail, then I turn and look up. The tall man at the wheel, the red-head boy in the crow's nest, the men perched on the sails like giant birds - all of them take note and do what they are there to do. They scan the horizons intently, their eyes narrowed against the sharp sun, then as one they turn to me and nod. All is well. With a slight smile I stalk over the deck towards my cabin, fastening my eyes upon that of the large man standing to one side. He knows now that no-one is to enter.

Softly I close the door behind me and stand for a moment looking at the form on the bed. She has fallen asleep dressed only in one of my shirts, which is long on her smaller frame and just barely covers the top of her thighs. Her blonde hair, which always feels like silk under my rough fingers, is fanned across the pillows framing her like a halo. In that moment i am unable and unwilling to move, and as i lean backwards against the door I can see her eyes open slowly, the bright green pinning me instantly with an incredible force. She creates a show of waking slowly, turns to stretch so that the shirt lifts perilously. I am transfixed - she does this to me every time. Her fingers curl tightly as she stretches every muscle. I have seen her hands clench like that before, and the thought makes my mouth dry. She does this to me. With a small smile she sits up slightly and holds out her arms to me, and without much thought I step into them. Out there my word is rule and my grip is iron, but here she is the captain. My hands slide under her shirt, around her waist. The skin is warm from sleep and I pull her as close as I am able to. Her arms

wrap around my shoulders, rub the tension out of my muscles, then trace a line down my neck and over my collar. One hand smooths my tangled hair gently, with the other she cups my face as she leans back. "You are tired" she murmurs, her voice curling tendrils around the nape of my neck. I am tired. I have been up for three days now and as much as the bare skin under my fingers makes my breath quicken... She pulls at my shoulders slightly and I end up sitting between her long thighs with my back leaning against her chest.

Steady fingers loosen my waistband and I can feel her kissing my temple gently, then my shirt slips off my shoulder and is instantly replaced by a soft warm mouth. I relax into her and when I feel her tender hands dance over my breasts I know as she does that this is just it; not a prelude to any action, but simply an action in itself. When I am impossibly limp and all but purring she moves from under me and slips off my boots quickly, then slides off my pants in an assured motion.

Freed from the confines of material i stretch and yawn and find my arms filled with Milena. A pale arm is wrapped around my waist and she presses her face to the hollow between my neck and my shoulder. The smell of her is sweet and soft, her breath like fresh air against my chest. I close my eyes and think only of her. Her voice, when it comes, is low and silky. "Am I to leave then?" It is neither a plea nor an accusation; she has simply asked a question and is resigned to whatever the answer may be. The sigh travels through my body, and lifting her hand from my waist she moves it to lie in the valley between my breasts. My skin is so dark against hers. It's not hard for me to close my eyes until the tears disappear, I have had the practice. I sigh again and her hand strokes my chest absentmindedly. "At the next port, Milena. We've spoken". She hides her head in my shoulder for a moment, and I feel more than see the nod. She knows. We lie like this forever, her head buried in my shoulder, my eyes clenched. I may have had the practice but sometimes it's harder than others.

I have had to let her go. At the next port she will get off this ship and disappear into the crowd and I will get back on the ship and sail into the sunset like a sad old fool. That I love her is beyond a doubt, that a day will go past when I don't think of her will be unlikely. She will wander these decks at night for me, and I won't want to sleep here where we are ever again. A woman like Milena does not belong here. Here, amongst only men with the harsh sun to hide from. For me it is different. This is my world.

Her breath evens out; mine catches.

I saved Milena. She was on a ship bound for god knows where with a firm mistrust of pirates. For good reason. When we boarded the ship I knew nothing of her. All I knew was the flag this man was flying and the hate I carried for him. I may not be good in the eyes of the law, but there are people who are truly bad, and he was one. It wasn't too hard; I boarded and raided until all that was left was the treasure and a beautiful blonde woman wrapped in a cloth with tear-tracks down her cheeks. The men did not behave as you would expect - I have never tolerated cruelty to women and they knew the penalty. They merely stood back as I moved towards her and lifted her face to look into her eyes. The first sight of those green orbs and I knew I was lost.

She is like a bought woman, now. She doesn't see it that way, and she has never treated me like

her master, god forbid, but what else could she do? I was the point of safety here, the one constant that she could hold on to. And she held on. Held on and on and I could do nothing but melt into her. She is not a slave, must never be the object of anyone. Not even me. I do not know that Milena loves me. She needs me. At any point I could have asked, could have given her the right to speak freely and she would have told me her heart's desire. But I am afraid that I will not be a part of it, I am afraid that she will not love me. And so I don't ask, and she doesn't tell. I will let her go. And she will go.

I pull her warm body closer to mine, a body that I love so dearly. I'm not sure how I will survive without her next to me. But she isn't mine. At the next port...

I will never forget. Years from now when the sun is setting and the men beat out melancholy tunes on the harmonica, drinking bad ale 'round the fire, the talk will turn to love as it inevitably does.

She will be what I remember.
