

**i'm a diver, love (and you're the ocean)**

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# **i'm a diver, love (and you're the ocean)**

by [seren\\_ccd](#)

## Summary

“Oh, I do beg your pardon,” Abigail said as she looked up. She froze when two blue eyes stared down at her. She exhaled, “Oh...”

Billy Bones stared down at her in confusion, but the confusion cleared quickly and recognition flared. Abigail heard a rushing in her ears that reminded her of the sound of water splashing against the hull of a Spanish warship and something stirred in her blood that she thought had long gone dormant.

After several years, Abigail Ashe has returned to England, but her story is far from over.

## Notes

This story kind of took an idea and ran away with it! I do hope you enjoy! Many, many thanks to my incredible betas for helping me wrangle my commas and fill in some blanks.

The title is from the song 'Canyon' by Joseph.

Abigail frowned at the selection of apples and debated on waiting until the next market to buy any, but her desire to try her hand at an apple pie was too strong. She let the merchant select several for her, she handed over her money with a nod and headed on her way.

The sounds and smells of Portsmouth, England were still something she was getting used to after the last two years in the Americas. The air was cooler in England and the sea was a flat grey that stretched from the harbour into the distance. There wasn't much that Abigail missed about the Americas, but she did miss the bright blues of the seas and the crisp greens of the evergreens.

*One year, she thought. You've been back for one whole year as of today. And you're going to make an entire apple pie for dinner and eat it all should you choose to.*

The thought made her smile to herself, and she ducked her head to hide it. She spotted the fabric merchant and started off in her direction to purchase a bolt of calico to fashion a new dress for herself, but when she veered sideways to avoid a small child, she ran full tilt into a very tall man.

"Oh, I do beg your pardon," she said as she looked up. She froze when two blue eyes stared down at her. She exhaled, "Oh..."

Billy Bones stared down at her in confusion, but the confusion cleared quickly and recognition flared. Abigail heard a rushing in her ears that reminded her of the sound of water splashing against the hull of a Spanish warship and something stirred in her blood that she thought had long gone dormant.

"Miss Ashe?" he said, his voice hoarse and his face weather-worn and bearded. His eyes flickered to her hand and he must have spotted her ring for he frowned and bowed his head, "Beg pardon, Mrs—"

"Berrington," she said softly, the weight of Robert's ring still as oppressive today as it was two years ago when she first accepted it. "But I still find that I answer to Ashe more readily." She kept her eyes on him, unable to believe it was truly him. "I... What brings you to Portsmouth?"

His eyes flickered up to her face and he raised his head. "The ship I crew with docked a few days ago. I'm looking for boarding at present."

"Oh," she said nodded and looked him over, aware that she was being rude, but unable to believe this man was standing in front of her. How many silly flights of fancy of hers had he appeared in over the years? Too many, she supposed. She spotted the way he leaned to one side and the bandages wrapped around his knee. "You're injured? Are you well?"

Confusion filled his gaze as did something like amusement as he replied, "One of the riggers wasn't as diligent as he should have been. Bit of the boom knocked me sideways and through my knee out something fierce." His jaw clenched before he said, "I'm no use to the crew at the moment, so I'm looking to rest. As ordered."

Abigail had followed the goings on in Nassau as best as she could with the limited amount of news she'd been allowed access to, but she knew that things had not gone well for the pirates. England ruled the seas once more and she knew that whatever crew Billy now ran with, it was highly unlikely to be Captain Flint's. That filled her with a sadness and a deep sense of regret that had never faded since she left Charles Town as it burned behind her.

"I'm sorry," she said and tried to smile. "I remember that you were always so busy on the *Siren*, you must despise being idle."

"Yes, I do," he said and his mouth formed a quick grin and then fell. "I hadn't... What are you doing here?" He winced. "That was rude, I'm sorry. I don't know how..."

He looked so uncomfortable that Abigail just smiled. "I remained in the Americas for two years before moving to Portsmouth a year ago. I live on the edge of town, near the cliffs."

"I see," he said and shifted on his feet as people rushed around them both. "I shouldn't keep you."

"Oh, yes, I, well," she said. She felt the weight of the apples in her basket before she did something rash and blurted out, "I have an extra room!"

His head whipped up to look at her, but he said nothing.

"I have an extra room," she said more quietly. "The house I live in belonged to an aunt of my husband's and is in a state of some disrepair. I have a groundskeeper and his wife helps when she can but they also have their own tasks and cannot always finish what they start. They have their own cottage. I...would be happy to give you room and board in exchange for some assistance with the repairs."

His brow furrowed and he just stared at her in confusion. Abigail couldn't blame him, she wasn't quite sure where the offer had come from herself. Some small part of her that remembered what it had been like to see him across a candlelit table, surrounded by men who were quite possibly the most honest she'd ever met. They didn't hide what they were. Especially this man. She'd always believed he was precisely what he appeared to be. How many times had she longed for simple honesty and blunt talk since those days onboard the *Siren*?

*That doesn't mean you should invite him under your roof,* she chided herself, but the offer was out there, too late to take it back now.

"I...thank you for the offer, Miss, Mrs Berrington," he said haltingly. "But wouldn't your husband mind?"

She lifted her chin. "Mr Berrington has been dead for a year and five months; I doubt he minds very much at all these days."

He raised his eyebrows at that, and the corners of his mouth ticked a little upwards. "Are you certain you wish to make this offer to me? I have a feeling it wouldn't do much for your reputation."

"I thank you for your concern," she said before she stopped and laughed a little. "Mr Bones, do you know what I truly came to the market for today?"

He frowned. "Provisions?"

"Yes," she said. "But specifically, I came in search of apples."

"Apples?"

"Apples," she said. "My husband hated them. With an irrational amount of fervour. Therefore, we never had any in the house. Not one."

"I see?" he said, clearly not seeing her point.

"I love apples, Mr Bones," she said simply. "I woke up this morning with the knowledge that I could take myself to the market and purchase as many as I could afford. And so I have." She smiled. "I make my own decisions these days, and the only person I care about satisfying is myself. I'm asking if you'd like to stay in a draughty room in a draughty house in the hopes that you will be able to fix the roof that looks as though it could be swept away with the next stiff breeze. I promise you, it isn't as lovely an offer as you might think."

"On the contrary," he said, and the corners of his mouth clearly gave up the fight as a grin emerged. "I think it's one of the more entertaining offers I've had in some years."

"Then you accept?" she asked, irrationally hopeful that he would and somewhat cross with herself for caring so much.

"I accept," he said with a nod. "Until my knee is fully healed. Or your roof is finished. Whichever occurs first."

"Good," she said with a smile and a sigh of relief. "I didn't really fancy another autumn with leaves on the kitchen table."

He grinned fully and then looked confused, as though his face wasn't used to making such motions. And perhaps it wasn't. Abigail knew what it felt like to hide one's emotions. So, to stave off any awkwardness, she merely tilted her head towards the road. At his nod, they set off towards her home.

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He settled in far faster than she imagined he would. He was hardly there an hour before he had scaled her roof and started arranging things. She stood on the ground staring up at him balancing on his uninjured leg while he hammered away at a temporary fix to her shingles.

Mrs Bates, the groundskeeper's wife, ambled over. "You finally got a labourer, did you?"

"Of a sort," Abigail said as she watched Billy move about. "He'll be staying here, actually."

She felt Mrs Bates' sideways glance, but given Abigail had discovered that the Bates' had been letting people poach off the Berrington estate for some time and Abigail had only asked them to keep things discreet, she knew that she'd hear nothing censorious from that quarter.

“Well, he looks capable,” was all Mrs Bates said. “I’ve some stew, if you’d care for some.”

“That’d be lovely, Mrs Bates,” Abigail said and smiled. “I’ll bring over that mending later, if that’s all right?”

And that was it.

One day stretched into a week, which stretched into two. It was strange sharing the house with another person, after her year alone, but it was nothing like the cold indifference she’d experienced with her late husband. For she had tried, at first, to enjoy her marriage or to, at the very least, appreciate her good fortune. But it was still terribly lonely and restrictive in a way that chafed her like nothing else had. Every now and then, she’d found herself comparing married life to how she felt in the cell in the Nassau fort: cold and alone and merely a pawn in someone else’s grand scheme. But then she’d dismiss the thought as terrible and unfair, her husband wasn’t cruel, he just wasn’t...much of anything.

But having Billy around, it felt so very different. He was quiet most of the time as he went about his work, ate his meals, and was generally polite and helpful. One day she brought home a newssheet and offered it to him. He grew more animated than she’d ever seen him, and she couldn’t help but be carried along by his enthusiasm for discussion, contributing what she could.

“Walpole is too entrenched in his country squire mannerisms to bring about proper change,” he said whilst he rubbed his chin, his dinner forgotten on his plate. “But the collapse of the South Sea Company may force his hand. Too many people have been impacted by the loss.”

“It always trickles down, doesn’t it?” she said absently spooning her stew. “When those that are more fortunate lose, those below them always seem to suffer even more.”

Billy looked at her. “Yes. Exactly. That’s what those at the top always ignore in favour of lining their own pockets. I’m surprised that you...” He cut himself off, cleared his throat and reached for his drink, his cheeks flushed with colour.

“Surprised that a spoilt lady of means would understand economics?” she offered, and her smile belied any irritation. “I was my father’s only child. When I was young, he taught me as though I was a son. He was different, then.” She looked down at her cooling stew. “When I turned ten, he stopped teaching me much of anything. But I continued to read.” She looked at Billy who considered her with an avid gaze and it was her turn to blush. “We all live in this world, it behoves us to know something about how it all works, don’t you think?”

“I do,” he said, and cocked his head to the side as though he’d never seen her before. “I do, indeed.”

After that particular dinner, he stopped being a labourer and began to be something else. She’d always thought him handsome, if perhaps somewhat romanticized as one does when they’re young, but now, she found him...compelling. At times larger than life, then at others, gentle and thoughtful. He became more than her memory of him and became a person of depth.

Eventually, she realized that *she* began to be someone else to him as well. She'd feel his gaze on her from time to time, assessing and appreciative and it thrilled her.

She'd lie in her bed, aware that he was just yards away in his own and she'd have to roll onto her side, curled into a ball, desperate to stop the ache that never seemed to go away.

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"No! Oh, you wretched, wretched thing!" Abigail shouted as she chased the cockerel that had just escaped from her hands and headed towards the house. She saw Billy lift his head and peer down at her from the roof, but she had no time to spare him a wave, intent as she was on catching the thrice-damned cockerel.

"You are going into a pie, my fine fellow," she said through gritted teeth as she crept towards the stroppy fowl. "And I'll be using your feathers for my pillow."

"Goose is better for pillows," Billy said from the doorway; the sound of his voice had the cockerel ruffling his feathers.

"The geese never give me as much trouble," she said as she stared the bird down. "This fellow has been sent from the depths of Hell to try me."

Billy snorted and asked, "Do you need any assistance?"

"Would you loom threateningly in the doorway, while I corner him?" she replied.

"I think I can manage that," he said with a chuckle.

"Good." Abigail breathed out and then she lunged.

Several frantic minutes and dozens of loose feathers later, the cockerel was once again in the hen house where he belonged and Billy helped Abigail repair the portion of the fence the bird had used to escape.

"I still have half a mind to roast you," she said to the cockerel who, even though he had some bald patches, still managed to look smug.

Billy laughed and shook his head. "You need a cat. A decent cat would keep him in line."

"I've been thinking the same thing," Abigail said and held the fence pole straight while Billy mended it.

"The *Walrus* had one named Betsy," he said. "She was a contrary old thing, but she kept the rat population in check."

"I'll check with the Bateses," Abigail said. "Surely someone in town has some kittens going spare."

Billy finished the repair to the fence and stood up, close to Abigail as they looked at the chickens.

“He probably tastes terrible,” Billy said nodding at the cockerel. “Hardly any meat on the poor bastard.”

“I know,” Abigail said with a sigh. “Besides, I have a nice joint of mutton that’s been stewing away all morning.”

“Is that what I smelled?” he asked and smiled a bit. “Been an age since I had mutton.”

“Good,” Abigail said looking up at him. “Lord knows I’d never finish it on my own.”

Billy looked away, his brow furrowed. “Mrs Berrington—”

“Abigail,” she said softly.

“Abigail,” his eyes flicked to hers and then away, “I don’t want to take advantage of your generosity. You do know that you don’t have to cook for me.”

“I don’t mind,” she said with a light laugh. “And I think you’re very generous to actually eat what I put in front of you. It isn’t as though I truly know what I’m doing. It was very good of you to eat that concoction last week. I know it tasted dreadful.”

“I can honestly say I’ve eaten far worse,” he said smirking. “However, not by much.” She gaped at him and he shrugged. “You’re right, it was pretty dreadful.”

She laughed and swatted his arm, but he just grinned and headed back atop the roof. Abigail headed back inside, and felt something a lot like happiness bubbling away in her chest.

Later that night, sat in front of the fire while Abigail mended a minor tear in her dress and Billy fashioned some hooks for fishing.

“You’ve changed,” he said after a while. She raised her head and he gestured towards the kitchen with a half-made hook. “Never thought the lady that came aboard that warship would be able to fend for herself.”

“I’m not sure if I should take that as a compliment or a slight against my younger self,” she said as she smiled to herself. “But I thought that as well when I first came here and had to make my first meal on my own. But...I think this is who I always was. I just needed to grow up some.” She looked at him. “You haven’t changed at all.” She looked away to hide her blush. “Not that I truly knew you before.”

“I’ve changed,” he said, and stared into the fire. “I’ve...done things. Betrayed people. For an ideal that the rest of the world isn’t ready to embrace.”

She wondered what he saw when he went so still and so quiet; and she knew that it was nothing she’d want to see or experience. However, she couldn’t seem to stop herself from asking, her voice no more than a whisper, “It was that bad?”

There was silence before Billy answered, “It was worse.”



Abigail didn't answer, but when she rose to head to bed, she paused beside him and gently lay her hand on his shoulder. He looked up at her, the firelight casting dancing shadows on his solemn face, and she smiled.

Softly, she said, "Whatever it was that you had to do... I'm glad you're here now."

He stared up at her before he reached up. His warm hand covered hers and he cradled it in his hand, before lifting it to his mouth. Her breath caught in her throat as he pressed his lips to the curve of her knuckles.

"I'm glad I'm here, too," he said, his breath ghosted across her skin as he looked up at her.

They stood and gazed at one another for a long moment, and only when a log popped loudly in the fire did they break their gaze.

Abigail reluctantly withdrew her hand from his. "Good night, Billy."

"Good night, Abigail," he said as she left the room.

Once inside her bedroom, she hurriedly opened her window to breathe in the sea air, in the hope the coolness of the breeze would bring relief to her flushed cheeks and thrumming heart.

It didn't, and she tossed and turned all night.

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The weather turned unseasonably warm later in the week and Abigail did her best to take advantage of the mild weather and attempted to set the garden to rights. She frowned down at the small corner she'd devoted to herbs and wondered what she could do to revive the wilting stems?

Billy appeared in the corner of her eye and she watched him head straight to the well for some water. The muscles in his throat worked as he swallowed. She swallowed in response and looked away when a flush that wasn't due to the sun spread across her face.

"Not quite the islands," he called to her. "But bloody hot, isn't it?"

"I wasn't expecting it," she called back. "Neither were my plants."

He walked closer and eyed the herbs. "I don't think those'll grow well here."

"No?"

"Too much wind," he said. "Too much cold. England requires it's plants to be a bit heartier."

Abigail wrinkled her nose. "Bother. I did so enjoy having fresh herbs in the Americas. And the flowers! Everything was so bright, every where you looked."

"It had its moments," Billy said smiling slightly. "Couldn't you have stayed?"

Abigail looked down at the scraggly little plants. "I could have. But then in addition to being Robert Berrington's widow, I'd also be the daughter of the late Governor Lord Peter Ashe. And neither of those titles sit very well with me." She looked up at him. "I have a minor amount of anonymity here. There are widows and daughters of lords around every corner."

He chuckled and nodded. "I take your point. Never saw that much of the Americas, even when we..."

Billy shut his mouth with a snap and looked away, over the sea.

Abigail studied him and worried her lip, certain that he was about to refer to the sacking of the coast he and his crew had embarked on. No. Not his crew. Not Billy's crew. *His* crew.

"It was him, wasn't it?" she asked, the herbs forgotten at her feet as she rose as tall as she could. "Flint. He was the one who killed my father."

Billy hesitated and for a moment, Abigail wanted him to lie to her. Tell her that it was one of the blasts from the warship, that her father had been killed in the general chaos. But that wasn't the truth and Billy Bones did not lie.

"Yes," he said, his voice low and gentle. "I wasn't there, mind. But I heard of it from Vane. Flint killed your father."

Tears pricked the backs of her eyes, but she forced them back. "I had...always assumed that was what happened. He achieved his vengeance then."

She clasped her hands together, mindless of the soil that dusted her fingers, and stared out at the sea as she examined her feelings. It wasn't precisely new information, simply a confirmation of what she'd imagined. It still managed to shake her somewhat.

"I..." Billy frowned and his hands clenched and unclenched at his sides.

"Don't apologise," she said shaking her head. "You had every right to despise my father. He wasn't very forgiving of pirates."

"No, he wasn't," Billy said. "Still...he was your father."

Abigail shook her head. "No. No, the man I mourned, and will always mourn, was the man who taught me to read. To enjoy nature. To hold principles like the truth and honour and justice in the highest of regards. The man who I saw in the Carolinas was a stranger. A stranger who was happy to let a woman be murdered in front of him and bestow no consequences upon her murderer. A woman whose only crime was loving her husband."

A light touch upon her hands startled her and she looked up into Billy's concerned eyes. He glanced down at her hands and she realised that she had been digging her nails into the flesh of her palms. She relaxed her hands and frowned when feeling returned to them.

"I'm sorry," she said, still staring at her hands. "I'm not myself."

"On the contrary," he said. "I think you're very much yourself." She looked up at him and he shrugged as he smiled a little. "You're human, Abigail. You have thoughts and feelings. You can hold two opposing thoughts in your head at one time. You can love and hate your father. It's all right."

She sighed. "It isn't that. Well, it isn't only that. I simply thought I'd left those feeling behind me."

"You can't leave those kinds of feelings behind," he said shaking his head. "They're always with you. Sometimes they're just a bit louder than you'd like."

"I think you might be a poet, Billy Bones," she said unable to stop a smile from emerging.

He went a bit pink even as he said, "And I think you might be the human equivalent of a deep water current."

"Am I?" she said laughing a little. "How so?"

"Well, people who know nothing about the sea assume it's the surface of the ocean you need to worry about," he said starting to grin. "And while they're not wrong, they cannot ignore the deep water currents. They're what keeps everything going. Just under the surface. They're powerful, strong, and steady. They never stop and when you catch the momentum of a benevolent one, there's no better place to be. That current'll get you where you need to be. Keep you safe and whole the entire way."

"You are a poet," she said softly. "And that's the loveliest thing anyone, any *man*, have ever said to me."

"Not a poet," he said as he reached up and delicately moved a strand of her hair away from her eyes. "Just a sailor."

"More than that," she breathed and his eyes widened.

"Yoohoo! Mrs Berrington!"

Mrs Bates' voice startled them both and Billy turned away, heading back to the roof, while Abigail dusted off her hands to go see what the other woman wanted. However, she couldn't stop replaying his words in her mind.

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A few mornings later, Abigail stood in the doorway looking out over the horizon. A strong cold wind ripped along the water, and she shivered when it reached the cottage.

"There'll be a storm tonight," Billy said as he walked up behind her. "It's been too warm these last few days. That cold will stir something up."

She looked up at him and asked, "How bad will it be?"

He squinted. "Bad enough." He met her gaze and put a hand on her shoulder. "I'd get the chickens locked up and anything else that isn't nailed down. I'll get something for the

windows.”

Abigail nodded and they went about their respective tasks.

They were on the heels of a mild autumn, and the chill that came with the sea winds left Abigail shuddering as she shooed the chickens into their hutch, and then she made sure to get plenty of water from the well. Although it was still afternoon, the darkness of the clouds had her heading inside, Billy already closing the storm windows he’d hastily put up.

They stood in the kitchen watching the storm roll in, the sunlight growing dimmer by the second.

Abigail shivered.

“It won’t be so bad,” Billy said, putting his hand on her shoulder and squeezing gently. “At least we’re not out in it.”

“Thank heavens for small mercies,” she murmured before smiling slightly up at him. “I’ll heat something up for an early supper.”

He nodded and when she moved away from him, the warmth of his hand lingered on her shoulder.

It was well past midnight when a loud crash woke her. Abigail sat upright in her bed, then realized that she’d distinctly heard glass breaking.

Forgoing her shawl and slippers, she hurried out of her room just as Billy emerged, shirtless and bootless from his.

“The kitchen window,” he said rushing past her. Abigail followed, sucking in a gasp at the sight of a large branch that had been blown straight through the window.

“Oh, no,” she said before rushing forward to help Billy wrangle the limb out of the window. The harsh rain pelted them both as they struggled against the high winds. Eventually the limb was pulled through and discarded. Billy looked around the kitchen for something to shore up against the broken, wide-open window.

“The table,” he said moving towards it.

Abigail hastily swept the items on the surface aside and onto a counter, while Billy lifted the table to stand it on its side. With a grunt, he lifted it to settle atop the sink and shoved it against the open window.

Abigail handed him some heavier items to shore it up against the wind and driving rain, then stood back.

Once it was where Billy wanted it, he stood back and chest heaving with harsh breaths he studied it, then he turned to her.

The heat of his gaze and the thrum of her pulse made her very aware of the fact that she stood before him in only her wet chemise which clung to her in a most immodest way. He was bare from the waist up and was overwhelming in his masculinity.

Abigail's lips parted as she stared back at him.

Later, she wouldn't be able to recall who moved first, only that one moment she stood shivering, the next she was in his arms, his mouth hot and desperate on hers.

Her hands curled into the hair at the base of his head and she pressed herself as close as she could to him.

He clutched at her chemise, fisting it in his hands, before he smoothed his palms over her back and bottom, curling his hands under her thighs and lifting her.

She made a sound of surprise into his mouth as she found herself lifted off the floor.

"Is this--?" he asked, his skin hot and slick under her palms. "Fuck, Abigail, tell me this is all right."

"Yes," she said gasping as his mouth trailed along her throat. "Yes, this is all right."

He moaned when she rolled her hips slightly against him and his hands tightened on her thighs as he took them both into her bedroom, kicking the door shut behind him.

Much later, even as the storm raged on outside, Abigail felt a mixture of emotions, but the primary one was one of safety. She lay encircled in Billy's arms as she rested on his chest and he dozed beneath her. His fingers every so often trailed along her back and upper arms, then into her loose hair to play with the strands.

"Is your leg all right?" she asked as she stared at the supposedly injured knee propped up outside the sheets.

He stilled beneath her and then chuckled. "My knee's been healed for about two weeks now. Which I think you already knew."

"I did," she said smiling against his chest. "But you weren't saying anything, so I didn't say anything. I...rather like having you near."

"I rather like being near," he said, his voice softer and more uncertain than she'd ever heard it. "I fear... I'm not a man to take comfort from, Abigail. And I fear that I'm going to put you into danger."

"Apples," she said as she ran her fingers over his chest, along the line of a scar that overlapped another.

"You're...hungry?" he asked.

"No, well, yes, actually, I am rather peckish," she said laughing as she lifted her head to look at him and he cocked his head to the side as he looked at her. "I said 'apples' to remind you

that I have only the things that I wish for in my home. Which means, I have apples whenever I want them.” She bit her lip and worried she was being too forward. “It also means that I’d like you to stay. I’m not afraid of the future, Billy.”

He lifted a hand to run over her hair while his other smoothed over her hip. With a move that made her laugh in delight, he rolled her beneath his body and kissed her mouth.

“You’ll marry me, then?” he asked once he’d kissed her breathless.

“Are you asking me because you want to or you feel you should?” she asked, running a finger over his shoulder.

“It cannot be both?”

“I’ve been trapped in a marriage not of my choosing,” she said seriously, her eyes downcast. “I’ll not do that to you.”

“Apples, Abigail,” he said, his mouth curving upwards and she looked at him, exasperated. “Like yourself, I don’t do anything that I do not wish to do. And I wish to marry you. Not for respectability for God knows I don’t give a damn about that. But because I want to be near you and because...” He frowned. “I...haven’t... I don’t know if I know what love is, but I think that I feel something that may be it whenever I look at you.”

Abigail’s heart raced and she pressed her mouth to his. “Then, yes, I’ll marry you, Billy Bones. And perhaps we can decipher love together?”

He smiled down at her and nodded, before arching an eyebrow. “Are you up for the challenge?”

“Are you?” she retorted.

“Oh, yes,” he said rolling his hips. “I’m definitely fucking up to it.”

With that proclamation, he lowered his head and loved her again. And again. And again...

They married two days later in the small chapel on the outskirts of town, the only guests were a few of his new crewmates and the Bateses. Abigail wore her prettiest dress of a pale blue calico and Billy trimmed his beard to a more respectable length.

The most obvious difference in her second marriage ceremony compared to her first was how she beamed in delight the whole way through. Not that Billy was much better as his eyes damn near twinkled the whole time, as though they were both shared some sort of delicious secret.

The ceremony proceeded as it should, the minister paused only when Billy corrected him in regards to his name.

“Manderly,” he said as eyes never left Abigail’s face. “William Manderly, if you please.”

At the end of the day, after a brief drink at the tavern in town, Abigail walked up the hill to her, their, cottage on her husband's arm. The lovely dinner left on the table by the kind Mrs Bates was ignored for hours in favour of retiring immediately to Abigail's bedroom and the roast lamb was terribly cold by the time they emerged, hungry and tired and happy.

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Before Abigail knew it, two years had passed. Billy returned to the sea and would be away for a month or so at a time and then appear, walking up the road, a bag slung over his shoulder and a relieved smile on his face for her when she'd meet him.

Never content to simply fall into the role of husband and seaman, he penned letters and treatises that Abigail would read over and help send for publication in whatever newssheet would accept them. Every time something of theirs was published, Abigail felt a stir of excitement and couldn't wait to show him when he returned.

One day in early autumn, Abigail stood over the stove stirring a large pot of apple preserves when she was interrupted by a knock on the door.

She paused and frowned as she hadn't expected anyone and Billy wasn't due back on shore until the following week. Wiping her hands on her apron, she went to the door and opened it.

She drew in a sharp breath as the man she'd known as John Silver stared back at her with eyes as surprised as her own.

They stared at one another in something like shock (and fear, if Abigail was being honest with herself, she'd heard the stories about him even before meeting Billy again), but then Mr Silver did something rather bizarre.

He began to laugh.

Abigail stared as he laughed heartily, his hand pressed to his chest and his head thrown back in abject delight.

Eventually, he calmed and regarded her as he said, "I believe I shall never be accustomed to how absolutely fucking small this world is. Miss Ashe, wasn't it?"

"Mr Silver," she said tightly. "Am I to understand that you're here for my husband?"

"If your husband is indeed William Manderly, also known as Billy Bones," he said. "Then yes, I am."

"Why?" she asked while her hand gripped the door and she wished she'd thought to grab a weapon of some kind.

He raised his eyebrows. "Can a man not visit an old friend?"

"But you're not just any man," she said. "You're Long John Silver. And if you mean my husband harm, you'll have to go through me first."

The most radiant smile spread across his face and he chuckled as he shook his head, “I swear, Billy has the best of all possible luck and I’m beginning to wish I’d spent more time with you all those years ago. Be at ease, Mrs Manderly, I wish your husband no harm. I’ve merely come to ask him for a simple favour.”

“A favour?” Abigail asked, furrowing her brow.

“Yes,” he said sighing and suddenly Abigail realized just how tired he looked, how drawn and haggard his skin was, especially around his eyes. “You see, Mrs Manderly, I need for Billy Bones to murder me.”

Abigail stared and then said, “Well, in that case, you should probably come in for a cup of tea.”

Pouring tea for a dreaded pirate wasn’t as nerve-wracking as she feared. Mr Silver was silent and polite, taking a seat at the kitchen table with an obvious relief that Abigail didn’t comment upon, and sipped from a teacup.

Abigail sipped her own tea and wondered where to begin, when Mr Silver interrupted her thoughts.

“Has he told you much about what happened?” he asked, setting his cup down.

“If you mean during the rebellion against England,” she said, setting her own cup in its saucer. “No, he hasn’t. Although I’ve gleaned some details along the way.”

“Yes, well, no doubt he wants to protect you from the more unsavoury details,” he said. “It wasn’t a pretty time.” He studied her. “Although, as I recall, you had your own unsavoury dealings with us pirates, didn’t you?”

“I did,” she said lifting her chin. “Although, your crew was the least unsavoury.”

“That’s because Flint swore to throw anyone who was disrespectful to you overboard,” Silver said, wincing slightly when he said the captain’s name. “The rebellion, as you called it, was a bloodbath, Mrs Manderly. And worse than that, it was a failure.”

Abigail froze as ice crept into Mr Silver’s voice and she watched as his gaze turned inwards.

“Some men when faced with such loss go a bit mad,” he said quietly, lost in his own memories. “Others seek solitude.” His gaze cleared and he looked Abigail in the eyes. “Others seek atonement.”

“You’re referring to Billy,” she said after a long moment.

“I’m referring to a great many men,” he said. “But yes. Billy has always had much loftier goals in mind than I. He wants to change the world. I’ve only merely wanted to satisfy my own desires.” He grinned. “On occasion, we found a common ground.” His grin slipped from his face. “But not for some time.”

“Why do you want to die?” she asked softly.



“Because Long John Silver has more than served his purpose,” he said lifting his teacup to his lips. “And I’m really rather tired, Mrs Manderly.”

He smiled at her over the rim of the teacup and despite herself, Abigail smiled back.

---

When Billy arrived a few days later, Abigail rushed out of the cottage to warn him about Silver and his presence.

She didn’t quite get the chance, for as she approached him, smiling as she always did, Billy dropped his bag to the ground and pulled her into a deep and very thorough kiss. She laughed into his mouth as he lifted her off the ground and batted ineffectively at his shoulders.

“Billy! Wait!” she said in between kisses.

“No,” he said cupping her face and kissing her again. “No waiting. I’ve been aching to have you since I left.”

His mouth was a wicked thing and she let herself drown in his affections for several lovely seconds, before pulling her head back to say, “I need to tell you something. It’s rather urgent.”

“Hmm,” he said nuzzling her throat. “You haven’t killed the cockerel, have you?”

“No,” she said, wriggling a little so that he set her down, but kept smiling at her softly. “But, well... You have a visitor.”

He stilled and lifted his head. Silver must have been watching from the doorway, for Billy instantly shoved Abigail behind him and had a pistol in his hand in mere seconds.

Silver just smiled that bizarrely benign smile at him. “If I had planned to hurt your wife, I would have already done so. More to the point, why the devil would I? She’s lovely.”

“What do you want?” Billy asked, frozen in place, and his grip on Abigail verging on painful.

“I need some help from an old crewmate,” Silver said stepping out of the cottage into the yard.

Billy shook his head. “Bullshit. Last I saw you, you were doing perfectly fine on your own, murdering your way across the seas in search of anyone who’d give you a fight.”

“Yes,” Silver said frowning. “You always were so dreadfully moral, Billy. You have just as much blood on your hands as I do, you just framed it all in the name of a cause.” He shook his head. “We all went mad, Billy, afterwards. You just found a better way of recuperating.”

His gaze shifted to Abigail and gone was the genial man she’d been getting acquainted with over the last few days. In his place was a man that she did not truly wish to know.

“Come near her,” Billy said, his voice low and steady, “and you’ll find out how Mr Dufresne felt that night.”

Silver's gaze lifted to Billy and he grinned, the darkness gone. "Help me and I'll never bother you again."

"Christ," Billy said under his breath as he lowered his gun. "What the fuck do you want, then?"

"I only want you to do what you're so very, very good at doing," he said, his hands spread wide. "I want you to tell a story."

---

Later that evening, Silver had left, after he'd refused dinner with the excuse that he'd 'hate to interrupt what had to be a much anticipated reunion'. Abigail wondered where he went, but figured the man could take care of himself.

Billy made love to her with a desperation she hadn't seen in him and afterwards, they lay in bed, sated but both troubled.

"Will you do as he asks?" she asked her voice barely a whisper.

"Yes," he said flatly, his fingers trailing up and down her arm. "I owe him that much. It was my influence that started him on this path. I gave him the means to use his name."

"You were not the one who wielded his anger, though," she said. "You're not responsible for all of his actions."

"I bear enough responsibility to see this done," he said. "And I'll not have you brought into the middle of this. I'll do what he wants and he can be on his way."

"I don't think he's well," she said her hand curled over Billy's heart. "You can see it in his eyes."

"I know," he said. "He's probably let that leg of his fester. Hell, he's lived far longer than anyone expected of him. 'Course, they'd probably say the same for me."

Abigail frowned and curled even closer to him. "Don't say that."

"Sorry," he said pressing his mouth to her head. "I don't mean to worry you."

"Too late," she said pressing her own kiss to his chest. "You'll help him, then?"

"Yeah," he said breathing out slowly. "It's time for that particular story to end."

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Two weeks later, it was done.

Long John Silver was dead. Lost somewhere in the sea in a wild blaze of glory.

And everyone believed it to be God's own truth, because no one ever doubted a story told by Billy Bones.

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Abigail sat in a chair beside the fire and mended, while Silver sat opposite her, staring into the crackling fire. The door to the cottage opened, letting in the cool night air.

Abigail rose to her feet, while Silver merely looked over at Billy who entered and closed the door behind him.

“It’s done,” he said coming into the room, sinking into the chair Abigail had just vacated, absently pulling her into his lap. She went willingly, and Silver simply continued to stare into the fire.

He sighed once, then closed his eyes as he spoke. “Good.”

“And you’ll be off?” Billy said tightly.

Silver chuckled. “I’m afraid I need one last favour.”

“For fuck’s sake-” Billy said.

“-from your wife,” Silver finished.

Abigail stared at Silver who smiled sadly back before he said, “My dear Mrs Manderly, would you be willing to pay a call on an old family friend?”

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“Are you certain he’s here?” Billy asked, his brow furrowed and his hands clenched into fists at his side. “He hated England. I think that also included Wales.”

“He’s here,” Silver said as Abigail peered down the innocuous-looking lane filled with overgrown shrubs and nettles which was located just along the border between Wales and England. “He hated England, yes; but you’ve seen the man’s complexion, he hated Nassau as well.”

Abigail smothered a chuckle even as Billy glared at Silver. “You could take this a little bit more seriously. You’ve asked my *wife* to stroll up to a madman’s gate and asked to be let in for fucking tea.”

“He’s not mad,” Silver said quietly. “He’s grieving.”

“Amazing how one can influence the other,” Billy said as he caught Silver’s eyes. “Don’t think any of us here has forgotten Charles Town.”

“Gentlemen,” Abigail said, and she, putting her hand on Billy’s arm when she caught sight of Silver’s countenance getting darker. “I’m nervous enough as it is, let’s not delay this any longer.”

“You don’t have to do this, Abigail,” Billy said still glaring at Silver.

“I don’t think that I mind,” Abigail said rubbing his arm. “And he won’t hurt me. I’m sure of it.”

Billy finally looked at her, his eyes softening, but his mouth pressed into a thin line. "I don't like this."

"So you've said," she replied. "Repeatedly. If something goes amiss, I will alert you." She patted her bag which contained a knife as well as a pistol. "And I'm not without my own protection."

"As if he'd give you the chance to reach for anything," Billy countered.

As this was a well-rehearsed argument by this point, Abigail merely leaned forward and pressed her lips to his mouth and whispered, "All will be well."

Then she exited the small cart they'd hired and set off down the lane. The property wasn't large, and was mostly used for sheep grazing; it supposedly belonged to a relative of Lady Hamilton's and had been left unoccupied for several years. Abigail wondered if this was simply another one of the many plans they had constructed during their time together. A place to escape from the madness of the world.

Not for the first time, Abigail wondered if she was doing the right thing by disrupting the man's solitude, but while she liked Silver (for who could not like him?), she had no doubt that if she did not do this, he would dog Billy's steps for the rest of their days.

She approached the gate and was surprised to see a tidy vegetable garden and a well-kept little cottage. A lush apple tree stood on the edge of the yard and she spotted several more behind it. A smile crept over her face. The scents of the herbs calmed her as she approached. She even had half a mind to ask him how he managed to get such lush herbs when she struggled to get her lemon verbena to grow, but shook her head and opened the gate.

The hinge barely made a sound before the front door opened and Captain Flint, formerly James McGraw, strode outside as he said, "I have no use for whatever it is you are bringing me, so kindly..."

His voice trailed off and he squinted at her before he said, "Miss Ashe?"

"Captain," she said, clutching her bag tightly with one hand, the other still on the partially opened gate.

He looked...older, but still quite healthy. His hair was longer and pulled back into a neat queue, his clothes were clean and tidy with his beard lined with grey. In short, he looked like a former Naval officer who lived in the countryside.

He blinked several times, looked past her down the drive and then rubbed his forehead.

"I'm sorry. Miss Ashe, what the devil are you doing here?" He stilled and his head snapped up to hers and she shivered with the dark, open look he levelled at her. "Revenge, is it? I cannot say I do not have it coming, nor would I be so bold as to attempt to dissuade you from your actions. Do what you must, Miss Ashe."

Abigail stared at him, bewildered, before she ascertained his meaning and she shook her head. "I'm not here for my father, Captain Flint."

"You're not?" he asked frowning. "Then what, pardon me, the fuck are you doing here?"

"I'm here to offer parlay on behalf of an old friend of yours who felt you wouldn't be willing to meet with him without advanced notice from a neutral party," she said. "Although, considering our own fraught history, I don't believe I can be considered completely neutral."

Flint stared her down before he said, "Fucking Long John Silver."

"Indeed," she said with a light laugh. "He's at the end of the lane with my husband."

"Your husband?" he asked and his eyes narrowed. "Who?"

"Your former boatswain," she said.

His eyes widened. "Billy fucking Bones is now the late Lord Peter Ashe's son-in-law?"

He started to laugh and Abigail sighed in resignation. It was becoming highly tedious, the way these men seemed to just fall into hysterics at the drop of a hat.

"Captain," she said sharply. "I haven't come all this way for you to laugh at the little ironies that our world seems to be built upon. In fact, the only reason I came here is because I love my husband and I would like him to live out the rest of his days without the spectre of Long John Silver looming over him." Flint fell silent as she spoke, so she continued, "I also came here because I have always felt responsible for the actions that occurred in my father's house. There were a great many more things I should have said and done and I have always wished I had the courage to do them." She looked at him. "There is a man at the end of the lane who has just killed a part of himself. And I believe he needs somewhere for the rest of him to reside. Apparently, here is where he'd like to do so."

"I'm not fit for company," he said, almost uncertainly.

"I don't believe you have ever been fit for company," she said. "However, that doesn't seem to put those who have loved you off."

He considered her for a moment before he blinked and said, "I beg your pardon. Ah, won't you come in?"

"Thank you," she said stepping into the house.

The interior was just as she pictured it: neat, tidy and spare. She spied a lovely bookcase filled with well-worn books and she longed to peruse the titles.

"I think I have some tea," he said moving behind her.

"That's all right," she said looking at him and smiling slightly. "We hardly need to stand on ceremony at this point."

He chuckled and shook his head. “No, I don’t suppose we do. But, please.”

He gestured to a chair and she sat, her spine straight, her bag on her lap within grasp.

“Why don’t you hate me for what I did, Miss, forgive me, Mrs Bones?” he asked after several long silent moments while they’d studied one another.

“It’s Manderly, as I believe you know,” she said. “And I did hate you. I hated you a great deal. But...” She sighed and shook her head. “Why should I waste time hating a man who hated himself far more than I ever could?”

“You are changed,” he said.

“Everyone keeps saying that,” she said smiling. “I prefer to think that I’m simply older.” She worried her lip. “Life is for the living, Mr McGraw. I’ve made it a priority to no longer spend my life contemplating the wishes of the dead.”

“Well said,” a smooth voice said from the door.

Flint’s eyes closed and Abigail turned to see Silver standing in the doorway, Billy a few feet behind him. Abigail smiled at him and got to her feet.

“You absolute shit,” Flint said, a growl beneath his voice. “Of course you’d use an innocent girl as your shield.”

“Bollocks,” Silver said walking into the house. “Abigail is a twice-married woman now, to a pirate no less. She’s hardly innocent.”

Flint got to his feet quickly, his chair clattered to the floor behind him. Abigail very swiftly found herself behind Billy as he watched his former captain and quartermaster square off.

“So dramatic,” Silver said with a sigh.

“And you’re not?” Flint retorted. “What’s it to be? Battle to the death? Here to take my head for leaving? That’s what you promised the crew should they ever desert you.”

“I believe my role in your scheme has been fulfilled,” she said pulling Billy away from the men. “We’ll just leave you to it.”

“Thank you for opening the door, Mrs Manderly,” Silver said, but her still would not look at her.

She nodded and quickly slipped out the door, Billy behind her. His hand immediately cupped her elbow and they walked away from the house. Abigail guided them to the apple tree in the corner of the yard and breathed in and out slowly.

“Are you all right?” Billy asked, ducking his head.

“Oh, fine,” she said waving her hand in the air and looking up at him. “Do you know I believe I’d like to start working on the garden in earnest this spring?”

Billy stared at her, looked at Flint's garden, considered it for a moment, then turned back to her and asked, "Would you like me to nick some of his root vegetables to start a new section?"

"Actually, I'm rather envious of his herbs," she said smiling up at him.

"Do you know, I'm still not quite sure why we're here," he said glaring at the house.

"Because they were your crew," Abigail said placing a hand on his stomach. "If I've learned one thing from my experiences with pirates it's that once you've declared loyalty to someone, you don't budge for love nor money." She paused. "Well, perhaps for money."

He smiled. "Perhaps for love as well."

Abigail grinned as she rose up on her tiptoes to press a kiss to his mouth. "That's a rather romantic statement from such a fearsome pirate."

"I've discovered over the years that the more dangerous the pirate, the more romantic the man," he said settling his hands on her waist, even as he glanced towards the house. "I expected more shouting."

As if on cue, a loud crash sounded from the interior of the house.

Abigail jumped and frowned. "Oh, my. Do you think they've--?"

"Possibly," he said with a sigh. He pressed a kiss to her forehead. "Wait here."

Billy set off towards the house and Abigail remained beneath the apple tree. Looking up, she spied several apples on the higher limbs and went so far as to eye the trunk of the tree before deciding that she really shouldn't climb Captain Flint's apple tree. It would be the height of rudeness.

The door to the house closed and she watched Billy, with a very red and exasperated face, stride towards her.

"Is everyone in one piece?" she called to him.

"Oh, yes," he said as he walked swiftly towards her. "They're fine. Fucking-- Christ."

Abigail frowned. "What on earth is the matter?"

"Old friends my arse," he said rolling his eyes. "I fucking knew it. And I fucking owe Joji a week's wage if I ever see the man again."

"What do you-? Oh," she said, realizing the nature of Silver and Flint's relationship. "Oh, I see."

"Do you?" Billy asked archly.

"Yes," she said smiling up at him. "I *am* a twice married woman. I know things."

“Is that right?” he said smirking ever so slightly as he got that glint in his eye that usually preceded lovely things for Abigail.

They were interrupted by the sound of Flint and Silver as they emerged from the house. While they kept quite the distance from one another, Abigail recognized the red marks around their lips as the burn a healthy beard could leave upon a person’s skin. She hid a smile and spared a moment to wonder why she didn’t feel as shocked as she probably should.

“Are you done?” Billy called to Silver.

“Not hardly,” Silver called back as Flint winced and rolled his eyes.

“I meant with my wife’s persuasive presence,” Billy said through clenched teeth.

“Oh, yes,” he said waving a hand. “You have my gratitude, Mrs Manderly.”

“I hope you’ll find some peace here, Mr Silver,” she replied.

“He won’t,” Flint said flatly but Silver just grinned at her.

“Then we’re away,” Billy said and grabbed Abigail’s hand. He paused, then said, “Good luck.”

“Who is that meant for?” Flint asked, his eyebrows arching.

“Both of you, I reckon,” Billy said as he turned to leave. He paused and glanced back at Flint, “Oh, ah, may I?”

Billy glanced up at the apples.

Flint looked taken aback, then said, “Help yourself.”

“Cheers,” Billy said, reaching up and snagging an apple that he handed to Abigail, who simply smiled up at him before taking a big bite.

She hmm’d happily and beamed at Flint, “These are lovely.”

“Take as many as you like, Mrs Manderly,” he said, his face gentling slightly as he looked perplexed.

“One’s plenty,” she said. “Take care, captain, Mr Silver.”

She tucked her arm into the crook of Billy’s elbow and they walked away from the house and the tidy garden.

Once inside the hired cart, Billy took up the reins and set the horses off at a quick trot.

Amused at his haste, she said, “I don’t think they’ll come after us.”

“You can never be too careful,” he said shrugging his shoulders as though to displace an itch. “I’ll feel better once we have several miles between us and them.”



She nodded and rested her head against his shoulder. "I feel as though I should be angrier. At Captain Flint, I mean. Do you know he thought I was there to exact some kind of revenge upon him?"

"For your father?" he asked.

"Mmm," Abigail nodded. "The thought never entered my mind to do so."

"It wouldn't. You're not a pirate, Abigail," he said, pressing a kiss to her head. "Thank fucking Christ."

"I'm in love with one," she said peering up at him. "Certainly that makes me a pirate by proxy."

"Nah," he said taking her hand and wrapping it around his arm, pulling her close. "It just makes me a very fortunate man."

She smiled and taking another bite of her apple, she turned to face the road ahead.

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