

Monsters on the Sea

By C. Jade Wyton

A pirate crew attacks a ship and rescues the teenage girl, Candi, from a life of mistreatment and abuse.

Contains violence, death, and non-explicit mentions of child sexual assault.

~~~~~

It was cold, and the smell of saltwater was overpowering— As it had been for weeks.

Was it weeks?

Candi wasn't sure.

She closed her swollen eyes and buried her face into her knees.

It had been at least *two* since she'd stowed away on the boat.

She felt the hair on her arms stand on end as footsteps approached the door of the room... and relaxed when they hurried past.

They weren't coming in.

Not that they would. These were the captain's quarters. And the footsteps weren't his.

That slithering *snake* of a naga was as silent as a... as a snake.

She pressed her face into her knees again and sighed.

*Four times*, she'd counted. Four times men had laid their hands on her.

First her father. Then her teacher. And then Prince Enspair.

And now this *creature* Tarork....

She couldn't bear it.

She might have cried, if she wasn't so dehydrated.

But the lump in her throat stayed. And she wheezed a heavy breath as she remembered what Tarork had told her.

He could do anything he wanted to her, and still be rewarded for returning her to Yearba.

She didn't want to go back. Not after what had been done to her.

She hadn't even defended herself— She'd been too scared. But Enspair's father had been furious at the rumours and taken action.

Candi wasn't entirely sure what she was accused of. She didn't know she was old enough to be put to death.

She wasn't even an adult, yet.... It was still four eclipses until she was of age.

She just wanted to go home to her mother and forget she'd ever taken the job at the palace. Go back to school, maybe. Learn how to read properly. Learn to cook instead of becoming a cleaner.

Anything but this.

More heavy footsteps sounded, this time above her, and she swallowed.

It sounded like something was happening on deck.

A thump.

A... a shout?

She huddled closer into the gap between the bed and the wall and tucked her tail tightly around herself.

*What was going on?*

It sounded like a war upstairs— Were they drinking? She hoped not. Tarork had been violent enough with her while sober.

She shivered at the thought of him wobbling into the room, as drunk as her father used to get, and tried to hide herself tighter in the cramped space.

Then heavy footsteps stormed down the hall and the wooden door splintered apart as it was kicked in by a booted foot.

Candi felt herself screaming as a secas, as green as the castle's rose bushes, shoved the broken door aside and turned to her.

She saw the blood-covered sword in their hand as they stepped toward her and she let out another dry-throated scream. She tried to cram herself further into her hiding place, but she was already so far back she could barely move.

The secas put a hand on the bed's head and bent down to peer at her. Their gills made a *popping* sound as they sighed and stood back up. They motioned to another secas —who Candi hadn't seen come in— that had begun ransacking the room.

The second secas stopped rifling through Tarork's drawers as the first discarded their sword onto the bed and crouched down at the opening to the gap.

The pair motioned to each other with their hands, as if having a silent conversation, before the second secas gave a frustrated grunt and joined the first.

The minute they laid eyes on Candi their gills clamped down hard and they gave a disgusted hiss.

Then the first secas edged forward and reached out a hand to Candi. 'Come out. We won't hurt you.'

The blood smeared over their clothes said otherwise, and Candi didn't believe them. She pressed back further into the gap and shook her head. She could barely breathe.

The second secas sighed and quickly pulled off their shirt and offered it to her. She didn't take it, at first, but when they placed it on the floor in front of her and backed away she slowly —carefully— took it and slipped it over her head.

It was awkward. The space was so cramped she could barely lift her arms. And the shirt was so big it fit her like a dress.... Though, being covered to her knees was a relief. Even if the shirt was covered in a sticky, salty slime from the secas. And....

She tried to push the blood to the back of her mind as she shifted back against the wall again.

'Come out,' the first secas urged. 'It's okay. We won't hurt you. Will we, Pexziz?'

'Nos. We'ses won'ts. Youses ares too smalls,' said Pexziz, motioning for Candi to come to them. 'Comes ons, littles ones. We'ses wants to helpses yous.'

Candi shook her head again.

'What's your name?' the first secas asked, edging closer to the gap's entrance. 'I'm Kei.'

Candi didn't dare answer. Not that she would have been able to if she'd tried,

her throat was so sore and dry.

'Come on, sweet,' Kei carefully slid toward her. They barely fit into the gap with her, but after a bit of wiggling they managed to ease close enough to put a hand on her knee. 'We'll help you.'

Candi wasn't sure she believed them. They were twice her size and covered in blood. And they had scars that made them look like they'd been in a hundred wars.

She swallowed, and knew she was shivering.

'I'mses movings the beds,' said Pexziz. 'Justs a littles bits. Don'tses gets scareds.'

She couldn't help it. Her heart was already pounding— And when the bed shifted a few inches away and Kei moved closer she let out another dry-throat cry and instinctively kicked out at them.

Not that it did much. She was too weak to fight as they brushed her flailing legs to the side and wrapped their arms around her.

'Shh,' Kei breathed.

For a moment she didn't know what the secas was doing and struggled.... But when she felt them begin to rock her back and forth she relaxed, and leant into the embrace and closed her eyes.

'*It's alright,*' they whispered. '*You're alright.*'

'Captains ises goings to's wants to's hearses abouts this,' Pexziz muttered. 'I'lls goes tells him.'

Candi heard the secas' footsteps as they hurried out of the room and toward the commotion on deck. She lost track of them when Kei pushed back her ears and kissed her forehead.

'It's okay,' they told her. 'Don't listen to what's happening up there. You're safe down here with me.'

She didn't know why, but she believed them this time.

She actually believed them! She couldn't believe she believed them. But she couldn't help it. Something about them felt safe, and real, and honest. And she believed them.

She shivered as the secas cradled her against their chest— Their heartbeat was calming and she was sure her own was slowing to match it as she was swayed gently to-and-fro. She felt fingers run through her hair and almost felt like she was home with her mother again.... If it wasn't for the secas' sharp nails, she might have been able to close her eyes and convince herself that all of this had been a bad dream.

'Shh, sweet,' they breathed. 'We won't let them hurt you anymore. You're safe, now....'

The words lulled her, and she let herself relax. Her tired eyes blinked shut and she felt her ears drooping as a long breath escaped her, taking some of her fear with it as Kei began to untangle the knots in her hair.

It wasn't long before the shouting on deck turned to nothing but heavy footsteps moving back and forth, and Candi's ears twitched as Kei stopped stroking her hair and leant towards the cabin door.

The pair listened to the approaching footsteps and Candi's stomach felt like it was trying to climb out her mouth as three more secas peaked into the room and

motioned to Kei.

Kei motioned back with a flick of their wrist, and shook their head.

'Youses sures?'

'She's not one of the crew,' Kei pulled Candi closer and made a motion to her face.

Candi guessed it was to one of her bruises, because it seemed to satisfy the secas; who filed into the room and began going through Tarork's things. Candi watched as they bundled everything of value into a large bag.

*Pirates*, she realised with a start. *These secas were pirates!*

'*Shh...*' the tip of Kei's tail entwined with Candi's own and they gave her a comforting squeeze. 'It's okay. They won't hurt you.'

She wanted to believe them, but the tallest of the trio flicked their blood-covered tail barb and Candi felt a whimper escape her.

'Qixiz, I's thinkses she's scareds of yous,' the shortest of the lot chuckled. 'Don'ts worries. Theyses outs of venoms.'

'Don't scare her, Tezaz,' Kei sighed. 'She's traumatised enough already—'

'—Captain'll want to see her,' Qixiz interrupted, their voice flat. 'I'd take her up now, before he heads back to the ship.'

Kei nodded, sighed, and then pushed themself to their feet. 'Come on, sweet. Can you walk?'

Candi nodded and let Kei pull her up. She stumbled at first, her legs weak with her exhaustion, but she flicked her long tail back and forth and managed to find her balance. At least enough to stand....

Now that she was on her feet wasn't sure she *could* walk. But with the eyes of the pirates on her she knew she had to take that first step— And when she missed her footing and stumbled forward, she was surprised that all four secas made to catch her.

Tezaz was the one who caught her. She fell into them as her knees buckled, and felt them heft her weight up as they carried her to the bed.

Nobody spoke as Candi caught her breath and tried again. She stumbled, but didn't fall this time as all the secas braced to catch her.

'Lean on me, sweet,' Kei said, gently pulling her close with their tail. 'There we go.... There we go.'

'*Thises is terrible, hmm, Xiv?*' Tezaz muttered to the last secas. '*Whatses kinds ofs peoples wouldses do's this? To's a kidses, no lesses!*'

'*Disgusting,*' Xiv replied, their lip twitching into a scowl. '*Captain'll be furious to see her state, he will.*'

'*He'll probably have us kill the whole crew for it,*' Qixiz added as they turned for the door. '*You know how he is....*'

Tezaz let out a popping sound from their gills, which Candi could only guess was a sound of agreement as they followed Qixiz out the door.

All but Kei went with them quickly; their hushed conversation fading as they headed for the deck.

'Walk with me, sweet,' Kei said gently. 'One step at a time. Lean on me as much as you need.'

Candi could feel her legs trembling as she did as she was told.

Her knees felt weak, and the constant rocking of the boat made it difficult or

her to balance her weight. Her tail lashed back and forth in her unsuccessful attempts to keep her footing. Fast and wild, back and forth with each change of the boat's own motion; but it was in vain. She was just too weak to keep herself upright on her own.

She was grateful for Kei's firm hold on her. Without them she knew she would have collapsed to the floor again.

'Up the stairs, now,' Kei told her. 'First step. Lift your foot a little higher, now.' Candi was trying.

She lifted her foot, trying to get it high enough to place onto the cold, embossed metal. But as she did the ship lurched and she stumbled back against Kei with a fearful cry.

'Oh! You're alright, I've got you. I've got you,' they said, righting her and holding her close. 'Come here, sweet. Let me carry you.'

Candi didn't have time to protest before Kei hefted her up and held her like a babe. Instinctively she wrapped her arms around them, closing her eyes tight as she felt them start for the deck.

She wasn't put down again when they reached the top of the stairs. Instead, Kei continued to carry her out from the lower quarters and onto the deck where, after weeks away from the sun, light hit her with an intense and blinding brightness.

She blinked quickly, trying to adjust her tired eyes to the outdoors. But when they did finally adjust she was hit with a sight that chilled her to her bones.

Dozens of bodies lay across the blood-stained deck; limp and contorted into unnatural positions. Some of them were the bodies of seces pirates, which were being gathered by their crew-mates and taken back to another ship that sat dangerously close to the one they were on, with ropes and boards latched between the two vessels to connect them.

But most of the bodies were members of Tarork's crew, and were pushed to the side or stepped over as the pirates went about their way....

Candi felt her heart began to beat harder in her chest when she saw Tarork. He and the other survivors of his crew were sitting together under the mast; their hands and legs bound in tight rope as they were poked and prodded and questioned by the pirates.

Candi was placed carefully onto the deck as she looked about at the scene, and she lashed her tail violently to keep her balance as Kei took a step back from her and cleared their throat loudly.

Following Kei's gaze, Candi tensed as she saw a shadow circling around the mast.

It was a monster. As red as blood and as long as the ship's mast was tall. It turned with a hiss, its frill flicking out in a ripple of glowing pink and purple that faded as it saw the young girl standing before it.

'By the great Vale Nor,' its voice was so deep it made Candi's ears ache. 'Pexziz didn't say you were so small. How old are you?'

Candi wasn't sure if it was a serious question. Her eyes darted from the beast to the dead men on the deck, then to the survivors of Tarork's crew and back.

When she didn't speak, the creature slithered back a pace and lowered its voice. 'Little one. You look young. Please, tell me your age.'

'Fourteen,' she managed, her voice cracking. She didn't mean to cough when she spoke but her throat was so dry she couldn't help it.

'Get her water!' the beast ordered the surrounding secas, its long whisker-like tentacles flicking in the direction of the other ship. Its frill flashed brightly for a second before it turned back to Candi and dulled itself down. 'You're bruised. Who bruised you?'

She wasn't sure if she should answer or not. She stood trembling for a moment before one of the secas stepped forward and offered her a bowl.

She hesitated before realising it was water and snatching it desperately. She drunk all of it far too quickly and choked at least twice.

'Who bruised you?' the creature repeated.

Candi's eyes flicked to the empty bowl, then to the creature. Then to Tarork.

'Him?' the beast asked.

She didn't know if she should say yes, but by the look on the creature's face her glance had told it all it needed to know.

'Come here, little one.'

Candi didn't move.

'Little one?'

She shook her head as it held out its hand.

'I see,' the creature's eyes narrowed as it withdrew from her. 'You're scared of me?'

Slowly, Candi nodded.

'Unsurprising,' it replied. 'And you'll only be more scared once you see what I'm about to do....'

Candi felt her legs trembling as the beast slithered backwards. She found herself holding her breath, waiting for it to lunge at her— But instead it turned to Tarork and flashed its frill in a ripple of angry purple as the secas pirates pulled the restrained naga upright and forced him to face the beast.

'And you had the nerve to call *me* a monster,' the creature growled, its long, whiskery tentacles slowly weaving their way around the naga's chest and arms. 'But now, under the moon that tattles crimes to your Goddess, you face what you are, raper of children, and lose your claim to your afterlife. May you be haunted by the rotting ghosts of those like you, and may your soul be swallowed by the Deep and the Dark; lost in the sands at the ocean's floor as you weep for sunlight and air.'

A horrible noise escaped through Tarork's gag as the creature squeezed him, and he thrashed in agony as he was pressed against the floor.

The creature's glare bore into Tarork as the flashing rage from its frill spread across its serpentine body, hot and bright and furious. It raised its hands and gripped the naga's head, forcing his gaze to meet its own— And then, with a horrible noise unlike any Candi had ever heard before, Tarork's head was pulled from his shoulders; trailed by wisps of torn muscle and flesh that swung through the air like meat from the palace kitchen.

Tarork's blood splattered the creature, invisible on its dark red hide, as his body fell to the deck with a dull *thump*.

And as the beast turned back to Candi, its bright lights going out, her legs gave way and she collapsed onto the cold metal beneath her.

Every seces rushed towards her but stopped short as the creature slammed its tail against the deck and shook its head.

‘Do not touch her!’ it boomed. ‘Do not lay a hand on her! Even in kindness! She has had enough of it!’

‘But Captain, she—’

‘—Enough!’ the beast gave a growl and a hiss, flaring itself like an angry snake, and then calmed as it turned back to the child.

It slithered to Candi as she lay trembling on the floor, its cool gaze meeting hers with a calmness that surprised her.

‘Do you want help to stand?’ it asked her.

She shook her head.

She wasn’t sure she could move if she tried.... And she was too tired to try.

‘I’m sorry you had to see that, little one,’ it gave a sigh and shook its head. ‘But now you can sleep well, and know he will never touch you again.’

It was a small reassurance, Candi thought, after all she’d been through.

‘Will you share your name with me?’

She didn’t answer.

‘My own is Cran Gakanorka Crune,’ it offered. ‘Cran, if you find it too long. I am the captain of my crew. And if it brings you comfort, I am the only male on my ship. The rest are seces, as you can see, and have no gender.’

It wasn’t a comfort.

None of this was.

It was terrible.

And terrifying.

And Candi just wanted to curl up in her mother’s lap and sleep away the pain.

‘Little one?’

She stayed silent.

Cran heaved a sigh. ‘We will return you to the shore—’

‘—No!’ Candi was suddenly on her knees, so quick she was barely sure she hadn’t already been kneeling. ‘I can’t go back! They— They’ll kill me! Please! I don’t want to die! Don’t send me back!’

‘Then you may come with us,’ Cran said gently. His frill rippled with a purple glow as he glanced to his crew. ‘We may have a spare bed.... If not, we will make you one.’

Candi hesitated as Cran offered her his hand.

‘We won’t hurt you,’ he comforted. ‘We’re not monsters.’

Candi looked to Tarork’s headless body, and wasn’t so sure.

‘You think he didn’t deserve it?’ Cran asked.

Candi wasn’t sure. *Did* he deserve it? After all he’d done to her she wanted to say yes. But she couldn’t bring herself to answer the question and instead buried her face in her hands and tried not to cry.

Then there was a long, mournful sound from somewhere in the distance. It was like something had heard her pain and sung it over the ocean’s waves, and Cran straightened upright, his frills flicking back as he listened to the sound.

‘Tarahara says another ship is coming,’ he mumbled, motioning with his whiskers to the captured crew. ‘Kill them quickly and without mercy; they forfeit their right to beg for their lives when they allowed this child to be stripped of her

youth.'

There was no hesitation from the seces pirates, and the muffled cries of fear from Tarork's crew were cut short as each of their throats were slit and their lifeless bodies were discarded onto the hard metal deck.

Candi stared wide-eyed at the pools of blood that leaked out of the throats of Tarork's men. She barely noticed as all the seces turned and began clambering back into their own ship, leaving her trembling under Cran's dim glow.

'Come, little one,' Cran urged, his voice deep but gentle as he offered her his hand again. 'We won't let anyone hurt you ever again.'

—END—

If you enjoyed reading, you can find more of this world on  
***demrefor.com***

You can also donate and help me pay the bills at ***ko-fi.com/jadewyton***

And, if you're interested in my non-Demrefor related work, head over to  
***cjadewyton.com***