



*Miranda, desperate for a means to watch over her brother, resorts to crime. However, a new love interest of hers may be a ticket to the life her brother deserves. Her luck would not prove so, her heart and family broken, she takes to the seas as a pirate.*

## **Lawless Women: The Jewel of the Sea**

by Alia N. Buresh

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Alia Nicole Buresh

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# Chapter 1

*Knock, knock, knock!* Someone rapped on the door. Inside the house sat a girl who was twelve years old. Her name was Miranda. She had begun to worry hours ago because she knew her parents should have been home by now. Her parents would not have bothered to knock like that, because her younger brother should have been well asleep by this time. Miranda knew something was wrong. She knew that door—the one someone was knocking on—was the only thing left holding back the horrible truth of what had happened, why her parents weren't home yet.

Before answering the door, Miranda put her younger brother, Jackie, to bed, instructing him not to get up. She figured whatever bad news stood behind that door, it would be better hearing it from her. She wanted to protect Jackie. When she finally mustered up the strength to open the door, Miranda saw two stage coaches, one she recognized as belonging to the town mortuary. She tore her eyes from the stage coaches to address the man standing at her door. She looked to his face for clues as to the severity of the bad news. His eyes were solemn and dark. She knew that whatever he had to say couldn't be good. Silence stood between them for a while, with only glances passing between them. The

glances spoke for themselves. When Miranda adjusted to the scene, she remembered her manners.

“Come in, sir, please,” Miranda managed to say.

According to her prompting, the man came in and took a seat.

“I think you know why I’m here,” the man said.

“I think so ... but I would like to know how it happened ... sir... if it’s not too much trouble,” Miranda stammered.

“That would be no trouble at all. Stage coach accident; they got hit, both dead. The other driver was unharmed.” The man recited it as if it were a speech.

Miranda didn’t verbally respond. She doubted it was an accident; her parents were not the most liked in the land. Her parents were very forward-thinking people; the majority of the townsfolk disliked her parents’ views of women as equals. They feared the changes in society that her parents supported. Her mind started accusing this situation of being more than just an accident, though she wasn’t sure who to blame. However, such thoughts needed to be put aside; there were more pressing issues at hand. Miranda turned her

thoughts to what would become of Jackie and herself.

“Sir, what is to come of Jackie and me?” Miranda inquired.

“Well, you’ll probably be sent to the girls’ home on the outskirts of town, and Jackie ...” he began to explain, without any real concern in his voice.

“Stop right there! Jackie and I are one package. I don’t care if I have to raise him myself, we will not be separated,” Miranda asserted.

“I see,” the man responded.

He then rose and left the house without another word. The closing of the door behind him seemed so loud to a dazed Miranda; her entire world was spinning around her. Miranda plopped herself down on the small, worn davenport. She didn’t know what to tell Jackie. He was only eight years old, how could he possibly understand? What would she even say? These thoughts raced through her head. Miranda knew she had till morning to come up with an answer. If she let it all out tonight, she’d be calmer tomorrow to tell him. So she began her breakdown, so she could start rebuilding her composure in the morning. She held her hands up to her face and let the tears fall down her cheeks. She crawled into the fetal position and stayed there all night. She didn’t even bother to pull on a blanket, though the night

was cold. She didn't feel anything, let alone the cold. She woke at the break of dawn. She cleaned up her face and got ready for the job at hand. She figured the first step she should take was to make Jackie happy, then break it to him slowly.

*But not so slowly that it puts him in agony,* Miranda thought to herself.

Miranda searched the cupboards but found that they were all but bare. She found minimal flour and lard. She went out to their barn, first going to address their one sickly old cow. Miranda milked every drop from the cow and still had little more than one small cup. She then went to the chicken to see what it could provide for breakfast for her and Jackie. She gathered the one egg the chicken had laid. The supplies seemed slim this morning but it was what it was, and Miranda was going to do what she could with it. When Miranda returned to the house, she realized just how cold it was. She then went to fetch wood for the stove. It wasn't long before she had a roaring fire in the stove and was making make-shift pancakes and eggs for Jackie, with a nice glass of fresh milk. Jackie woke to his plate set on the table. He sat down without a word and started devouring his breakfast feast. It wasn't till after he had finished that he turned to Miranda.

"Where's Mum? Where's Papa?" Jackie asked.

It broke Miranda's heart; she had to fight for control so the tears wouldn't win. Her knees were weak. She stood there searching for words, trying to be the adult she needed to be. When her strength returned, she began her explanation.

"They're home," Miranda tried.

"I don't see them. Where?" Jackie asked.

"No, honey, we won't see them. What I mean is, well, you know at church, how they tell us ... tell us the great Papa in the sky has a home for all of us. Well, Mum and Papa went off to that home," Miranda explained.

"Without us?" Jackie pouted.

"They're getting it ready for us. Someday we'll join them, but it will be years before they call us," Miranda explained.

"I thought the Great Papa was getting it ready," Jackie said.

"Well, everybody needs help sometimes," Miranda responded.

Jackie seemed satisfied with her answer, happy even. Miranda felt she had addressed the situation well. It was true he didn't quite understand entirely, but he knew he wouldn't see his parents, but that they still loved him. Miranda was satisfied with that,



and began picking up after breakfast. After cleaning up, Miranda got Jackie ready and they went to town. The first place Miranda visited was the mortuary; she needed to figure out how to address the deaths, both from a legal standpoint and concerning burial. There she found the man who had paid a visit the night before. Her arrival seemed to be of no surprise to him. She looked the man in the eye, then turned to Jackie.

“Jackie, go to Will’s house. Tell his mother that I am taking care of business, and ask if you can play with Will,” Miranda instructed.

Jackie left to do as bidden. The man took this as his signal to approach. Miranda waited for him to speak.

“I presume you’re here to figure out how to keep your brother in your care?” he inquired.

“That much is true,” Miranda confirmed.

“And you think you’re ready for this responsibility?” he asked.

“I do,” Miranda answered.

“Martial Law exists; you could claim it. Though, do you really think a little *girl* like you could handle it?” he asked.

“How do I get that officially set in stone, that I’m claiming it, that Martial Law?” Miranda inquired.

“I can help you out with that, little lady,” he said.

He spoke with a very condescending tone. He had no faith in her decision to take care of her brother, but she would show him. He pulled a file of documents out of a cabinet. He set it in front of her. She began to read it, though she was only semiliterate and was obviously severely struggling. So he started taking care of matters for her. He then pulled out more papers. The whole ordeal was overwhelming to her.

“You ready to discuss burial?” he asked.

“Yes. I suppose such matters must be taken care of,” Miranda said.

He handed her a paper he had been writing on before continuing with burial matters.

“Well, I think this settles it. You can take your brother home now,” he said.

Miranda was filled with pure relief and gratitude.

“Thank you, sir,” she replied.

He then spread out paperwork on the desk. Miranda’s mind wanted to focus on anything but the task at hand. She didn’t want to think of how she

was going to bury her parents. So instead she focused on his desk. It was made of hard wood. On it was carved swirling lines in the corners, which ran down the side. There was a single flower carved in the center. Soon enough, however, her mind returned to the task at hand. The man looked hesitant for a moment.

“Would you like to see their bodies?” he asked.

Miranda debated in her head whether she could really handle seeing them. But slowly she nodded. She wasn't entirely sure that she wanted it, but she followed as the man led her down the hall to a small room. As they entered, Miranda's heart broke further. Though a white blanket covered them, she knew what the forms lying on the beds were. Twenty-four hours earlier those forms had left for the market, with the promise to be back for dinner. Now they never would. Now that was her job. Now everything was different. Miranda slowly pulled back the sheet. Her mother's beloved face was pale, and her head was cracked open at the top. It was like a picture from Miranda's worst nightmares. Miranda choked back tears. Her knees were about to give on her; her face began to match the tone of her mother's. The man left the room to give her some privacy.

As soon as he left, Miranda fell onto her mother, weeping on her mother's chest one last time. When

she had cried as much as she thought she could, she rose and turned to the second bed. She pulled back the sheet and there was her father. She remembered his strong arms, once wrapped around her, which now lay limp. She threw her arms around him, and the tears she didn't believe she had again began to flow freely. It was many minutes after the man returned that Miranda finally gained her composure. She then followed him into the other room for planning.

"Which graveyard will they be buried in?" the man asked.

"Saint John's" Miranda responded. She was trying to be direct, for fear of losing control if she wasn't.

"What do you want for the ceremony?" the man asked.

"Something within my price range, but sweet and sincere," Miranda responded.

He showed her the options, and prices associated with them. Though there were options, there weren't really, because she could only afford one. So it was decided to have a very simple service. There was very little else to decide. No flowers ... the priest would say only a few words ... and it'd only be a graveside service. When Miranda had finished answering his questions and filling out paperwork,

she said goodbye to the mortician. She then walked over to pick up Jackie from Will's house. Thoughts of the service swirled in Miranda's head as she went to get Jackie. Miranda knocked three times upon the door.

"Hello, sweetie, how are you dealing? I am truly sorry," said Mrs. Lystad, Will's mother.

"I ... am coping, ma'am ... And how are you this fine evening?" Miranda responded.

"I am living and can't complain. Sorry for your loss. I was happy to watch Jackie for you," Mrs. Lystad said.

"I sincerely appreciate it. It was a major help. I got the business of where Jackie and I are to live looked after. I also looked into arrangements for the burial ceremony. I really didn't want Jackie to have to see that. I needed your help, so I can't thank you enough for watching him," Miranda said.

"Oh, yes, so when do you head off to the girls' home? Don't worry. I'll take great care of Jackie," Mrs. Lystad said.

"Neither of those things will be happening. Jackie will be staying with me," Miranda informed.

"Jackie staying with you at the girls' home? That's hardly appropriate," Mrs. Lystad insisted.

“No ma’am, that wouldn’t be appropriate—Jackie at a girls’ home. However that will not be the case; we will live in our house. I aim to raise him myself,” Miranda persisted.

“You must be joshing me! You two, all alone in that house? Oh, I see! You’re getting married! How wonderful!” Mrs. Lystad said.

“No, ma’am, I’m not getting married. It’ll just be Jackie and me,” Miranda responded.

“Are you ... um ... uh ...” Mrs. Lystad stammered.

Mrs. Lystad didn’t approve of these arrangements; her mannerisms made that quite clear, though she heeded proper etiquette. Miranda didn’t much care what the townsfolk thought of her actions. To her, it mattered so much more that her family didn’t break more than it already had with its recent loss. So rather than speak to back her cause, she simply got Jackie and took him home without more than the necessary chit-chat with Mrs. Lystad. Miranda instructed Jackie to begin completing his normal chores. She didn’t want him to feel anything had changed; she wanted life to continue for him as normally as possible.

Meanwhile, Miranda went out to milk the cow. Just when she thought nothing more could go wrong, the cow had finally run dry. She had heard her parents worry about the cow getting old, not

producing like she should. Now the cow had nothing left, not a drop to give Jackie. Now it was *her* concern.

“Please, Bessie, give me something, anything. I can’t do this on my own,” Miranda pleaded. “Look at me, begging a cow! What a pit I must have fallen into,” Miranda said, speaking to the air.

With that lack of fortune, Miranda carried in the empty bucket and went to gather the egg. One egg—what was that, a few bites? Miranda was very discouraged. Soon Miranda found herself out in the garden, desperately searching for a sprout of hope. She found two big, ripe, plump carrots and a big, juicy beet, but bugs had gotten into all the potatoes. The bit of produce she found rekindled her courage to continue being the guardian she needed to be for Jackie. She retrieved water from the well with her new-found strength. With the water from the well Miranda cooked up the vegetables, stems and all, then tossed them in a pan with the egg and fried it. It was hardly a supper, but it’d have to do. She fed it to Jackie and sent him to bed. She herself had nothing to eat; there was only enough food for one. Just before sleep claimed her, she said a simple prayer: a prayer for guidance and an easier tomorrow.

The next morning Miranda woke early. She knew she needed to find a way to support Jackie and herself. Now that she had claimed Martial Law, her

next step was to get the stability to pull it off. That would require a job. So before Jackie had fully awakened, she bundled up to head into town. But first she gathered and cooked the egg for Jackie to eat when he woke up.

The first place she went in town were the shops that required “woman’s work.” She thought her luck would be better there. Menfolk didn’t often like women taking their jobs. She knew how to mend and other basic sewing, so she found herself headed to the seamstress’ shop in search of a job. Miranda couldn’t stand the head seamstress, but she needed work.

Ms. Lorlita, the head seamstress, met Miranda at the door. Ms. Lorlita was flighty, pretty, clueless, and a perfectionist. She didn’t know much, but she could sew very well. Unlike Miranda, she fully accepted the “women’s role” and was very delicate. Despite her conflicting personality, Miranda knew her heart was in the right place. Because of that, Miranda wished to like her, but just couldn’t enjoy being in her company. Miranda couldn’t stand her gossip and shrill personality.

“I was wondering if you had any job openings?” Miranda asked, taking a seat in Ms. Lorlita’s parlor.

“My dearest Miranda, I wish I could offer you something, but with the wedding and all I just can’t



afford ... *Oh!* I haven't told you ... you probably know ... everyone knows ... the whole town is bouncing with joy. Look! I'm engaged!" Ms. Lorlita said, thrusting forward her hand to show her ring. "He's sooo sweet, but back to matters ... I just can't afford to hire anyone else. You understand that I can't hire someone just because we're friends, right?" Ms. Lorlita exclaimed.

Miranda missed the rest of Ms. Lorlita's banter; her mind went elsewhere. Miranda thought it was funny that Ms. Lorlita called them friends. But then Miranda thought about it. Though she couldn't stand her banter and perfectionism, Ms. Lorlita was only a few years older. When Miranda was desperate, she had turned to Ms. Lorlita first for work. She knew Ms. Lorlita would care. Thoughts of her relationship with Ms. Lorlita subsided and Miranda remembered she needed a job.

"I really hate to cut our visit short, but I *must* find a job. I need to support Jackie and me," Miranda interrupted.

"I wish you the best of luck and, if all else fails, just find yourself a man," Ms. Lorita said, in a tone that was *way* too perky for Miranda's taste.

*Like I need a man*, Miranda thought as she exited onto the street.

In her search for a job she went next to Tom, the local grocer. She figured he could use a hand here and there, and he was like a second father to her. However, when she got to his stand, she took a look at his stock, and changed her mind. She could tell things weren't going well. He had a few things, but nothing was replenished. What he had was starting to get old. Miranda felt bad for him, and wished she could help him somehow, but had to attend to her own struggles first.

"Hey, Tom, how's things?" Miranda asked.

"Well I'm alive, so I guess that's something. Not for long s'pose, though. With this lack of business, I can't afford food really; I've had to dig into my stock. What I have here is all I have until I have to sell out," Tom admitted.

"Looks like we've both fallen on some bad luck. I'm having to take care of Jackie after the death of my parents. Right now I'm actually lookin' around for work. Do you know anyone who's hiring?" Miranda asked.

"Sweetheart, you know I'd hire you in a second if I could, I just can't afford it," Tom said, head down.

"I know, I completely understand. You have to look out for yourself," Miranda replied, and she *did* know.

“As for jobs I’d try the blacksmith. I hear he’s been looking for an errand boy ... or girl, I s’pose. He ought to give you a chance. I know how the world is nowadays, but you can do anything a guy can do,” Tom suggested.

“Thank you,” Miranda responded.

Miranda quickly made her way to the blacksmith’s. When she got there, he was making horseshoes. He saw her and paused his work. He removed his hat.

“What can I do for you, Ms.?” he asked.

“I heard you were looking to hire someone to run errands?” Miranda inquired.

“That’s right. I need someone to get supplies for me. Do you have a brother who’s looking for a job as an errand boy?” he asked.

“Actually, I was hoping to get the job myself. I promise I’d work hard,” Miranda informed the blacksmith.

“No,” the blacksmith said.

“I thought you said you needed someone to go get supplies for you,” Miranda interrogated.

“I said I need an errand *boy*. I don’t need some weak girl slowing down my process.” He put his hat

back on. "Come back if you find a boy for the job," he finished.

He turned back to his work and started paying her no mind. Miranda was infuriated! She held her tongue. Despite her anger, Miranda exited the shop calmly and went further in her search for a job. She looked into jobs in multiple places, however it was the same everywhere. People didn't believe in her abilities as a woman. "We don't need a girl" ... "Girls can't do this work" ... "boys only" ... was all she heard. Miranda got fed up with it and returned home just in time to pick Jackie up from school. Miranda set to her job of being a guardian to Jackie. She went out to the barn and found an egg to prepare dinner for Jackie. She cut out the bad spots on the potatoes, leaving little left to eat, and boiled them. She fed Jackie dinner. Miranda tried making small talk with Jackie, but lacked focus. She had too much on her mind. She worried about the road ahead. She flashed back to the present when Jackie broke the silence.

"Egg, egg, egg. When Mom and Dad went home did they leave us anything but eggs?" Jackie asked.

Miranda couldn't help but laugh.

"Tell me if you find what else they left, okay? I'd be happy to cook it up for you," Miranda said.

"Can you cook up a davenport?" Jackie asked.

“I don’t believe so. I think eggs are more edible than a davenport,” Miranda replied.

Jackie had given her an idea, though. They could sell the davenport. She could sell their possessions. If she sold things, she could get money to buy food for herself and Jackie. That plan could work to support her and Jackie for a short while. It had to because Miranda wasn’t going to work in the saloon. She didn’t think she could handle the pirates quite yet; she’d learn how if she needed to.

The next day Miranda sent Jackie off to school with a note excusing his absence the previous day. Miranda then found a couple of spare buggy wheels in the barn. She knew she wasn’t particularly strong and could not lift the davenport up onto the buggy herself. So she pulled a board off the side of the barn, and a small shovel handle to use as an axel, and placed the board on top.

Miranda then dragged the davenport and makeshift buggy to the door. She lifted one end of the davenport up to the “bed” of the contraption. The board only got in the way, so she tossed it on the ground. She picked up the back of the davenport and pushed. Every so often she had to readjust the davenport, but her contraption took some of the weight off onto the wheels, although not a lot, in Miranda’s judgment. It was heavy. She was pushing

this davenport into town when she ran into a young man.

“Do you need help, miss?” the young man asked.

“That would be much appreciated, sir,” Miranda conceded.

He got behind the makeshift buggy and helped stabilize the davenport. Together they pushed it to the local furniture trading center. Miranda traded it off for a fair price. She had spent some time bargaining with the man there. It wasn't till she went to leave that she noticed the young man was still standing there, waiting for her to finish her business. She was embarrassed; he had helped her, and had stood there patiently waiting this whole time, and she didn't even know his name. She hadn't even thanked him yet.

“I'm so sorry. Where are my manners? Thank you so much for your assistance. I don't believe I caught your name,” Miranda said to him.

“Archibald, but you can call me Archie,” he responded. “And yours? I don't believe I caught it, either.”

“Miranda ... my name is Miranda. All I can offer you is thanks for your services. If you're waiting for me to pay, I have nothing to give you. My apologies,” she said.

“No, no, none of that. I waited because I wish a favor in return. May I have the pleasure of walking you home?” Archie asked.

“I would invite you, but, see, I am not going straight home. I have a few more errands to run,” Miranda explained.

“I think a stroll through town sounds real nice,” Archie insisted.

Miranda owed him, and thought she was a forward-thinking woman, and she also had manners. Miranda could not refuse; he had helped her and this was his only request. Archie held out his arm for Miranda and she willingly accepted it. Miranda started attending to her errands. Miranda first went to the butcher. She picked up a small bit of beef, for beef was the cheapest of the meats he had available. She knew Jackie would be excited to have some real meat. Miranda was overly thrilled at the thought of food. She was so hungry that she couldn't even tell how hungry she was; she just felt sick.

“Oh! How thrilled Jackie will be when I cook up something other than an egg!” Miranda exclaimed.

“Are you saying you've only been eating eggs?” Archie asked.

“Yes, well ... I mean ... I haven't been eating at all for the last couple days. Our hen only produces one

egg in the morning and one in the afternoon. I would never take that away from Jackie's mouth. He comes first," Miranda explained.

"He?" Archie asked slightly discouraged.

"Yeah, *he* ... as in, my little brother, Jackie," Miranda explained.

"Oh, how old is he?" Archie asked, relieved.

"He's almost eight. He's a great scholar, a brilliant boy. I only wish I could help him more. Girls can't go to school, so I only know basics Mum and Papa had taught me. They always thought it was important for anyone, even women, to be literate," Miranda bragged.

"I agree with your parents. I feel a woman should at least be allowed to be taught to read and write. Letters can be quite important and meaningful. Can you read and write?" Archie asked.

"I know the basics, but I definitely am not super-proficient. I know my letters, but my spelling and vocabulary aren't very great," Miranda responded.

Miranda finished up her basic shopping. She got herself a little meat, a couple of veggies, and some flour. When she was done with her errands, she started heading out of town with Archie sharing the



load of groceries. She didn't need help with her small parcels, but he had insisted on being a gentleman. They exchanged mild chit-chat on the way to Miranda's house. Archie helped put away the groceries. Though on guard, for she had only just met him, Miranda greatly appreciated the help she was getting. She had been so tired from lack of food, and from working to figure out how to support Jackie, that even her minor tasks seemed like a strain.

"Is your father home?" Archie inquired.

"Um ... uh, well, you see ... He recently went to his eternal home," Miranda said hesitatingly.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't know," Archie apologized.

"Before you ask, Mama went with him," Miranda responded.

"Well, then, I have no one but you I need to ask. May I come calling sometime?" Archie asked.

"I ... I suppose that would be fine ... I'll be working on any job I can find, but that don't seem to be much, so you might find me here often. Drop in any time you like," Miranda responded.

"I can't wait. May I ask, will I ever meet Jackie?" Archie asked, finding a common interest with her.

“Yes, and don’t mention Mum and Papa. I don’t think he fully understands. I’d kind of like to keep it that way ... for his own good,” Miranda requested.

Archie nodded and soon departed from the old house. Miranda sat down for a moment. Miranda had said yes without thought. Now it really hit her and she grew worried. When he said “come calling,” he was asking if he could court her. Miranda had second thoughts, worries, doubts. She wondered if she really had time for a guy caller. She knew she needed to focus on getting a job, she needed to focus on taking care of Jackie. Aside from her worries about having time and her other priorities, Miranda at least mildly feared the fact that she had never had a suitor before, and had no clue how to handle that situation.

Miranda pulled her thoughts away from her new situation and instead set to work on sorting through possessions. Miranda wouldn’t give up on trying to find a job, but she needed a plan B. She went through her own personal possessions first. She kept a pair of old trousers that were her father’s when he was a boy, and an old shirt for herself. Miranda pulled out a small necklace from her mom’s jewelry box. Miranda almost cried at the thought of giving it up; it was a locket her mother had given her. Inside was a family photo and an open spot Mum had left for a “future suitor.” Miranda’s mom meant for it to be a gift to Miranda when she got old enough to have a

suitor. Miranda couldn't give it up. She strung it around her neck and delicately fondled it in her hands, thinking of her mother.

She turned back to the old trousers and reevaluated keeping them. She'd outgrow them, and she didn't know when she'd get a new pair, if she ever did. So she threw them on the pile that left first. In place of the shirt and trousers she kept an old, everyday dress of her mother's. That way, she wouldn't outgrow it. She kept only the most rugged brush for her hair. The rest went to the sell-first pile.

When she was done going through everything in her chamber and her parents' clothes, all that remained kept for good was her mum's dress, the hairbrush, and the locket. All her childhood treasures were, though irreplaceable, necessary to part with, so that she could get some money for food off of them. Next Miranda went to her parents' room. She felt this would be harder. How could she give up their possessions? How could she decide what mementos of theirs she could afford to keep? But the necessary must be done. She couldn't afford to keep most of them.

Miranda started the second-to-go pile. In it was her mother's china, her father's navy uniform, her mother's beloved music box, and many other treasured memories. Miranda played the music box one more time, it played a beautiful hymn. Father

had given it to her mother as a gift on their tenth anniversary. It played “Amazing Grace” and she pictured her mother playing it and holding it close, just like Miranda was doing now. Miranda slowly set it back in the second-to-go pile with the other beloved treasures. Then Miranda picked up her papa’s old sword and she mentally went back to a happier time ... Her father handed her the sword and she toddled around, fighting off pirates who existed only in her head. Being the hero, saving the day. Her mother asked if she thought that sword would help her chop the carrots, smiling brightly. Jackie was smiling as a baby on the davenport ... But the present inevitably had to return. It wasn’t as bright as the memories, and Miranda hated it. Miranda kept the sword. She justified this decision as a means of self-defense.

Miranda put the books in a last-resort pile; she knew Jackie loved to learn. How would she ever give him the knowledge opportunities his brilliant mind deserved? She needed to give him a better life than was destined for her. Miranda saw so much more potential in him; she just knew he was destined for greatness. By the time Miranda finished her task of going through things, only the sword, books, locket, and necessities (a pair of clothes for each and the stove and Jackie’s bed) were not in one of the piles to be gotten rid of as needed. The workload never seemed to end anymore.

When she was done going through things, Miranda set to cooking up part of the meat she had bought at the market. The rest she put in the drying house, to be made into jerky. She didn't let even a drop of the meat juice go to waste. She cut out all the rot on the potatoes and was left with little, but mixed it in with the meat juice and made it as nicely as she could. Dinner was finished shortly before Jackie came home from school. Jackie came home bright-faced. Miranda dished out two small bowls of her meat potato gruel. Miranda's face mirrored Jackie's smile, and she truly felt happy. Just because Jackie was happy was reason enough to be happy.

"Did you know that they've made a refracting telescope? It was invented by some man named Hans Lippershey," Jackie said.

"I didn't know that," Miranda responded.

Truth was, she had no idea what "refracting" meant, or what a telescope was. But if she asked and he didn't know, it'd kill his moment of glory. She wanted him to enjoy the knowledge he had acquired and to let him show it off, so she didn't ask and just let him continue. Miranda sat there eating, listening to Jackie go on and on about some beautiful piece of poetry, and some new scientific discovery. School only lasted so long by mandate of the county. Then they'd have to pay to send Jackie to school and she couldn't do that. Life would go on, but only to waste

Jackie's talent. It absolutely broke Miranda's heart and made her wonder if she was doing right by him. Soon Miranda put Jackie to bed.

The days seemed to pass in this order for a while: Miranda went job searching and did the chores all day. If something needed to be sold for food, she'd go sell it at the market and buy the food they needed. In the afternoons, when she was tired and discouraged from the long days, Archie would often pop in and help cook dinner (though he obviously lacked experience) and they'd greet Jackie when he came home. It seemed almost like Miranda had a real family again. Archie, Miranda, and Jackie were family. Jackie loved Archie. Miranda felt the weight lifted off her shoulders when Archie was around. And Archie was just head-over-heels for Miranda and her strong spirit. One night Archie made a suggestion.

"Well, you guys have often welcomed me into your warm home. Mine might not be as warm and loving, but I'd love you guys to feel welcome there. Maybe fill some of the empty space with joy and love. So how about I take you guys over there for dinner?" Archie proposed.

"Yes! Please, Miranda! Please! Can't we go to Archie's house?" Jackie pleaded.

Miranda looked at her little brother. He may be brilliant, but he was still just a kid. Miranda smiled. It amused her how much he wanted to go to Archie's house. She thought of how nice it would be not to be the one hosting the meal. Then she shrugged. She couldn't think of any reasons to object.

"Looks like Jackie's going whether I do or not, so I might as well join you two," Miranda responded.

"So, it's settled! I'll take you to my house tomorrow," Archie replied.

So plans were made for dinner the next day. Archie came to escort them to his house in the afternoon. Miranda thought of dressing up and then remembered she only had one dress. She pulled up her hair anyway, because she thought it'd look nice if she was going to be visiting Archie's home, especially for the first time. Archie held Jackie's hand and offered Miranda his other arm. Her arm fit perfectly in his; it was like a picture from a happily-ever-after family. Miranda wished every moment could be like this one.

"I hope Caroline is finished cooking by the time we get there. I'm hungry," Archie commented.

"Is she your sister?" Miranda asked.

"No," Archie answered.

“Mother?” Miranda guessed.

“No,” Archie replied.

“Cousin?” Miranda asked.

“No, she’s my most trusted maid. But she might as well be a sister. Before I met you guys, she was all the family I had. I too lost ... um ... My parents also went to the home in the sky. Just not at the same time, like your parents did,” Archie explained.

“I see. Family isn’t always blood. She sounds nice; I look forward to meeting her,” Miranda commented.

“I hope she’s as good a cook as Miranda,” Jackie commented.

Miranda and Archie laughed. The three of them chatted all the way to Archie’s house. Archie’s house was much bigger than Miranda had expected. Archie was actually pretty wealthy; his “house” was more like a mansion. He just hadn’t brought it up, since he didn’t want it to be a factor as to why Miranda was with him. His mansion was bigger than Miranda could have dreamed. She was slightly awestruck as they walked to the door. Caroline greeted them there.

“Supper will be ready shortly, if you’ll just wait in the library. Oh, goodness me! I didn’t introduce



myself! My name's Caroline. Might I say, Miranda, you're just as beautiful as the master said, when he rants on about how great you are. And this must be the loveable little Jackie," Caroline said, escorting them into the library.

Caroline was a delightful soul. Jackie looked around in awe and amazement. He didn't know anyone could own so many books. The walls of the library were lined with them; it was like Jackie's fantasies come true. Fiction and nonfiction, any story or information you could wish for was there for the taking.

"May I read, Archie?" Jackie asked.

Archie nodded and set Jackie free to roam as his heart desired. While Jackie roamed the library, Miranda and Archie sat and talked. They sat in big, comfy chairs by a rock fireplace. Archie started a fire; it began to crackle as they sat there. They looked into each other's eyes.

"How are things?" Archie asked.

"Well, as you know, Jackie is excelling in school, despite a lack of proper supplies," Miranda responded.

"Yes, but you know that's not what I mean," Archie said.

“Well, it looks like the potatoes are coming back, and we’ll have those for food come spring and summer.” Miranda emphasized the positive. “And we’ve sold all we can do without. But I think I’ve found a place where I can work,” Miranda said.

“I know you well enough that I won’t offer you money. But please tell me this job isn’t what I think it is,” Archie pleaded.

“I haven’t another choice. I can’t sell anything for money because I have nothing left to sell. And if I accept money, I’ve failed. I haven’t struggled this many months just to fail,” Miranda insisted.

“I know. Just promise me: if any of those scumbags mistreat you, you’ll tell me and I’ll show them not to,” Archie said, threatening the non-present parties.

“Archie, as a bar wench I am bound to be violated and it will be like there’s no offense. But these are pirates. You can’t take them all on. But I’ll be fine, really, Archie. I won’t let myself get hurt,” Miranda said, trying to comfort him.

An uneasy tension set for a while between the two, but soon was blown away by the chatter at the dinner table. Archie didn’t approve of Miranda taking that job, however he knew it was her choice to make. Meanwhile, the little family was growing; Caroline couldn’t get enough of little Jackie.

Everyone got along, there was great food, fun conversation, and family bonds being forged and strengthened as Caroline got to know Miranda and Jackie. The night was perfectly pleasant. The evening, however, had to end.

The next evening Miranda had to work. Her dress was sensible, respectable, and modest. But the freedom of her ankles was a key factor leading towards many violating words and rough “love pats” from pirates. The first time she was given a “love pat,” Miranda spoke up against it, but her employer threatened her employment. Miranda needed the job. So Miranda continued to ignore the comments and “love pats” from the scoundrels and pirates. She even got desensitized to little smacks on her posterior.

Archie and Miranda never talked about Miranda’s job. It was a sore subject between the two, but they talked of everything else. He was not only her suitor, but also her best friend. Miranda didn’t want Archie to know her job didn’t pay enough to support Jackie and her. Her house tax would be collected in a week and she only had half of what was due. Provided she wanted to eat, she couldn’t make up the other half in time.

Miranda was a proud girl and would not dare ask for charity. Because of her pride, she was faced with a dilemma. She was already working every double

shift possible. She knew many wise women would ask for money from Archie, had they been set in her place. But she wasn't wise in that way, so she set to look for another solution to her problem. Marriage? Her thoughts strayed. Could she possibly be shallow enough to marry for money? No! She decided right away she wouldn't. She'd never manipulate someone's feelings, let alone love, to better herself; that was beneath her. She didn't want to hurt anyone in that way.

Given fifty guesses, she never would have guessed her own next actions. She was unsure of her decision, and by no means proud of it. When Jackie had fallen fast asleep in his bed, Miranda snuck out into the dark veil of night. She slipped by the blacksmith's back door. The blacksmith had more money than he needed, and was only kind to those whom he considered his friends, or to those he could get something out of. Miranda found herself thinking back to his response to her plea for work; it helped her prepare for the task at hand. She was so infuriated with his rejection of her because she was a girl. She entered as the man was closing shop. He looked up at her, then continued to close up shop. He mustered a grunt to greet his intruder, which is what he obviously found her to be.

"What do you want?" he managed.

Miranda spotted a bag of currency sitting on a desk. She quickly thought up an answer.

“I was wondering about horseshoes?” she said.

“You? What money do you have to waste on horseshoes?” He grunted.

Miranda walked slowly and casually towards the bag of precious coins.

“Well, you see, I was thinking I might need to sell the old workhorse. I could get a better price if she was properly shoed, I figure,” Miranda explained, lying through her teeth.

“You got the money for the shoes?” he interrogated.

“That’s why I’m here. I don’t know how much they cost,” Miranda said. Slowly and nonchalantly, she inched toward the desk.

“Well, depends how many you fixin’ to get yourself,” he said, seeming more interested.

“Let’s say all four? How much would that cost?”

“That’ll be an enormous expense,” he said.

Miranda found herself in front of the desired desk location.

“What if it was just one of these?” Miranda motioned towards some horseshoes sitting on a table.

He looked at which shoes she was looking at, what quality of metal. She used this as an excuse to turn around, long enough to slip the small bag into her bosom.

“Again, expensive. Do you know what steel costs?” he said. He was evidently getting agitated with his guest, because it was late. Miranda found herself ready to take leave.

“Well, I guess I won’t be able. I’m sorry for troubling you. I suppose I must be going,” Miranda said as she exited.

Once Miranda was safe at the barn she couldn’t help but laugh. She had sold the workhorse three months earlier. She didn’t know why she was laughing. She didn’t know if that is what struck her funny or was it the relief? Either way she found herself almost in hysterics. When she finally calmed herself, she decided to count the coins. It was perfect, just enough to pay taxes with her little income. She felt she must hide the money till the tax collector knocked on the door. She didn’t want to be found with extra money, but since it’d all be leaving her hands soon, she felt—more deeply, hoped—she’d get away with this.

Promptly on Saturday morning the tax collector was at the door. Miranda felt this was a test, to see if she could provide. She felt no one believed that she'd make it this far. The tax collector held out his hand. Despite her method of acquiring the money, Miranda felt a sense of pride setting the money in the hands of the hated man. Though not through the most honest methods, she had gotten the money to take care of Jackie and had acquired it on her own, without asking for help.

Archie continued to stop by. Miranda and he were ever so close. They shared just about everything with each other. Miranda hated keeping secrets from him, and she wished she didn't have to. She wished she herself did not know of her deed. She was very ashamed of what she felt she had to do, but she justified it by believing she was taking care of Jackie. Jackie was progressing greatly in his studies with the help of Archie and Archie's amazing library. Miranda was happy with her life. Everything was beginning to fall into place. She didn't even mind that no one remembered her birthday. She thought about the fact that she was turning thirteen. To her, that was practically a woman. She was the woman of her house. At first she hated the stealing she had done; it bugged her so deeply at first. But necessity began to make a habit of stealing, and Miranda slowly became numb to it. She only stole

from those who could afford it, never from fellow people in need.

Since her employment occupied her night hours, and Jackie was at school during the day, Miranda had to find things to occupy her daytime hours. Archie spent a lot of the daytime with her, she did the chores, and she slept, as well, so she'd have energy for work, but she was still left with hours to fill. Restlessness filled her body.

One night, while working at the bar, she observed what seemed to be like a sport of sorts between the pirates who came to drink there. Crowds congregated around two men with swords, however the owner didn't stop it like he normally did rowdy fights that could end in pain. It drew her attention as she wiped down tables. It was a fierce battle of metal against metal as swords clashed. Finally, one of the men dislodged his opponent's sword from his opponent's hand into his own. He had him in a death lock. He could have killed the man at this point. Miranda was sure she was going to witness a decapitation. Just then the man with the swords in his hands removed the swords from his opponent's throat.

"You see, my good man, that is how it's done. Anyone else wish to challenge me?" the victor asked.



This man was different from many of the men who drank here. She had noticed him a few times. Yes, he seemed to be a pirate, however he was well-kept and at least half sober even during late hours. Miranda paid close attention to the movements this man used technique-wise while sword fighting. He was skilled with a sword in ways that exceeded any of the other pirates, almost like he had training. She tried to learn from watching him. This became Miranda's new hobby, although not in public by any means. She'd go out in the barn with her father's sword and practice techniques she had observed Edmond—as she now knew the man to be called—use. She found it to be a good workout. Archie sometimes would join her in the barn and they'd duel. It was great fun for Miranda, and she always won (except when she let Archie win).

Miranda's life kept this cycle. Miranda really liked her life, but she feared that she was going on a downward path. It seemed Miranda was a quite a thief, but no one expected a girl to be the mastermind. Another year passed in this manner; Miranda was now fourteen. Nothing much had changed during that year after she had adjusted and had started to steal. Now that Miranda was getting older she feared it would change. Miranda was getting into her marriageable years and she knew it; she never mentioned it to Archie, though. She was nervous about the idea, however he was a man and

four years her senior. Surely he would know when it was time. She knew she loved him, and he loved her. That was enough for Miranda.

Miranda was scrubbing floors while at work one night. She looked across the floor and found it was just sitting there—a treasure map. Miranda looked around for someone who might claim the article. She then took into consideration the fact that everyone would try to claim it. After a bit of glancing around, Miranda stuffed the map into her bosom. She found it the best place to hide things. When she got home from work, she took a look at the map. She envisioned pulling up the treasure chest, paying for Jackie to have all the schooling he desired. He would not be dumb, like she found herself to be. She stuffed it back into her bosom. It gave her nice things to dream of.

Time passed and Miranda's life didn't change much. Miranda might have grown up in many ways. Jackie had grown a lot. At almost eleven, he was a genius to Miranda. Miranda was almost fifteen by this time, and Archie was getting even more deeply into her heart. She felt confident in their relationship and loved it the way it was, but she was beginning to wonder if it was going to move forward. Would he ever propose? Miranda also wondered, *Was she herself showing signs of not being ready?* She hoped not. She felt ready.

On her birthday, after they had tucked Jackie in for the night, Miranda and Archie went for a walk. He walked her to her favorite spot overlooking the ocean. It was a rocky cliff that only Miranda, Archie, and Jackie knew the safe ledges to, where you could get down to the sea splashing up against the rocks. Mist filled the air and it smelled of the ocean. Miranda loved that smell; it made her think of freedom. It was a full moon, and the moon shown down and illuminated both Miranda's and Archie's eyes. Archie's arm was around Miranda's shoulders.

"You know I love you, right?" Archie asked.

"Of course I do. You know I feel the same," Miranda answered.

They both looked out at the sea. Archie then turned his head to look at Miranda. She wasn't a big woman, and she was young. She was beautiful and her eyes were sparkling with love. Her hair blowing in the wind encircled her tender face and tired eyes.

"Miranda ..." Archie said, hesitating "I know I've practiced this a million times in front the mirror, and you're my best friend so I'll admit that, but it's different saying it to you now." He paused.

Miranda looked up into Archie's eyes with her own.

“Miranda, my life has been so much happier, more fun and exhilarating since I’ve met you. I have felt like, like I have a close family. Jackie is like a little brother to me, and you, you’re my light, my smile, my laugh. I am nothing without you. You make me stronger and make me believe in myself more. You push me to my limits. You accept my flaws and care about all of who I am ... I guess what I am saying is, I never want to be without you and I want to make sure you’ll always be mine. So I was wondering, will you ...” he stammered and got down on one knee.

“I’ll marry you! Yes, yes, yes,” Miranda answered the half-asked question, thrusting herself into Archie’s arms.

They both fell over and just laughed. So much relief and joy consumed their whole beings. After Archie and Miranda had calmed down enough to think straight, they lay down next to each other, looking up at the stars. Archie turned to face Miranda. She followed suit.

“Thank you. And thank the good Lord in heaven,” Archie said, planting a kiss on Miranda’s forehead.

They laughed again. Soon enough they had to go their separate ways. Jackie was almost as excited as Miranda herself. It was the happiest day of her life.

“Archie’s going to be my brother!” he exclaimed.

Miranda knew it wouldn't take long for news of her engagement to spread all over the town. Gossip tended to travel quickly in the village, whether or not people wanted it to. But she didn't mind if people knew this; she couldn't be prouder than to be Archie's wife, as she soon was planning to be. In fact, by the time she made it to work the whole drunken lot was singing "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow." Everyone cheered when she entered. Her boss even allowed her a shot of the finest brandy, on the house. Miranda wondered how anything could ever spoil her mood, life, or anything. For a moment, everything was perfect.



*Miranda, desperate for a means to watch over her brother, resorts to crime. However, a new love interest of hers may be a ticket to the life her brother deserves. Her luck would not prove so, her heart and family broken, she takes to the seas as a pirate.*

## **Lawless Women: The Jewel of the Sea**

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