Whistle for the Wind*
By Keira Doig

Bad Luck.

That's what Sirena would have been told if she had tried to board a ship normally and by normally, she meant looking like herself. A woman

Everyone in this sorry excuse for a town believed that women were a curse, believed to cause storms, rough seas, or even anger the sea gods.

Instead, she had to tie her long black hair up and cover it with a hat of good measure, she wore a long-sleeved navy shirt and black trousers that she had to turn up the bottoms of so she wouldn't stand on them with her own boots, the only thing she was wearing that was not stolen from her brother's room, if you could even call this ramshackle place she lived in a house. Never mind having rooms.

She bound her chest tightly and uncomfortably but if it got her across the sea and away from this place, she would be quite content with it. Sirena grabbed her bag from the floor, which already had all the money she owned, clothes she would probably never get the chance to change into and some extra food. She checked herself one last time satisfied that she looked like a man. She opened the door slowly willing it not to fall off its hinges like it had done multiple times before. The smell of the sea washed over her and she felt her shirt already clinging to her arms; the last thing that she grabbed was her brother's jacket.

She walked the cobbled streets the gulls cawing above her looking for any scraps they would find. The creaking of the wooden dock sounded under her feet as she went from ship to ship. Some sported flags of their country, others had homemade ones and a few had house sigils as the boats bobbed up and down, water lapping against their hulls.

She continued looking for a captain in need of a crew member to no avail until she reached a ship, its name *The Barracuda* engraved in peeling sea-green paint. She turned and almost jumped out her skin to be eye level with a pale skinned, blue-eyed gentleman, who she presumed was the captain.

"A place on your crew," she said bluntly. Manners didn't matter here.

"How old are you?" he said running his gaze over her. She swallowed deeply.

"Fourteen," she lied, although her voice was deeper than most women her age – which was actually sixteen – she was likely to sound like a younger boy.

 "Experience?"

"A few years." Another lie. She could tie knots but that was by no means experience.

*An old sailor's phrase meaning hope for the impossible.

"Get on. We're leaving in a matter of minutes," he said taking her by the shoulders and pushing her onto a board that bent under her measly weight as she clambered aboard.

"Your name?" he asked in between giving orders.

She said the first name that came to mind, "Kai," her brother's name.

They left without issue and their voyage went well for two days, she laughed and joked, earned her place at meals with them, learned to play cards, even winning the occasional game.   She listened to the tales that older seafarers told. Sirena had just started to relax and get used to the sway of the boat that often lulled her to sleep when the storm hit.

The crew were screaming over the thunder as they scrambled to tie things down, Sirena herself was trying her best not to get thrown off the rigging, her knuckles white as she edged her way down, the rain lashing her skins like needles and the wind carrying her hat away.

Sirena hit the deck which creaked under the storms power, a mighty wave slammed into the boat causing her to tumble to the ground, her back catching a sharp nail. She got up anyway, rushing to help the nearest person tie barrels down. She met his brown eyes water running down the crooked ridge of her nose that she had broken two years ago in a fight.

The boy tilted his head slightly and Sirena went back to tying the knots. He came around to her side and helped her taking the rope and tied it tightly, he looked at her sidelong and gasped.

"What?" she screamed over the storm.

The boy looked like he had seen a ghost, his brown hair plastered to his forehead. "You're, you…" he looked her up and down, she followed his gaze to see her hair flowing over her shoulder and the nail it had caught…She felt her storm grey eyes turn to saucers.

"Sea gods," he muttered. She stared at him debating whether it would be worth throwing him overboard and saying he fell in the storm, but she didn't have the chance.

"Woman on the ship!" Someone screamed and like everyone else she turned at the sound to find a man pointing at her. She grimaced and started to scramble backwords.

There was nowhere to go, she didn't see the point in crying or screaming as they hauled her up. All she said as they strapped the weights to her boots was, "Please." But she was not making it to that new life barely days away.

Sirena was pushed and jeered to the edge of the ship. Her legs hit the banister as her hands splayed over the uneven surface, she glanced over to the deadly sea.

"Please," she whispered, as one of them picked her up, she looked at the boy who had helped her with the barrels as if he could do anything, her stomach tightened to the point of pain.

One last time she said it gripping the man's shoulders staring into his cold electric eyes.

"Please," it was a desperate sob.

But before long she found herself tumbling into the cold dark stormy waters.

The weights dragged her down, her ears popping, she lay there on the seabed watching the water above, its colours a kaleidoscope of blues and greens. The sheer beauty almost made her feel at peace.

Then it happened as her vision darkened, she felt her teeth changing as she reached up to touch them, she jumped at the fact they were razor sharp. Quickly she kicked off her boots, her hair framing her head like a crown, she looked down as her feet began to turn into a tail, and her legs slowly started to fuse together her trousers gone like they never existed.

She screamed.

Panicked, she tried to swim away choking on the water she had opened her mouth to, as if it were something she could escape from. She looked down at the deep blue tail the scales coming to a stop at her midriff.

She coughed clawing at her throat, then it was as if the water was normal air.

A voice ran out clear and beautiful, Sirena found herself drifting towards it.

"Tossed in the sea never to return.
Tossed in the sea without concern."

The voice belonged to a girl with a sunset red tail and dark skin, she repeated the lines, then gripped Sirena by the shoulders. "But now it's time for revenge."

Sirena felt the cold water rushing into her veins and she grinned wickedly as the girl led her away.

She would never forget the face of the man who had thrown her overboard, not when he had looked at her without pity, and she certainly wouldn't forget his face as she pulled him to the bottom of the sea.