

**The Shadow at Sea**  
**By: Terence D. McLean**

The man lay in front of me blood dripping from his face. He didn't move and his breathing was shallow. I could feel death creeping into him. His chest filled one last time and then...nothing. The breathing stopped.

It had been days since I had seen death. I was reawakened by the sight of it. I could feel my heart beating in my chest again and air filled my lungs as if I had never taken a breath. I felt alive.

The sound of the waves crashing against the hull returned to my ears. They would want to blame me for the death, but the chains that held me so that I hung, my feet not touching the planked floor, would argue my case for me.

The door, to the small room they kept me in, opened. The man who entered looked down at his dead shipmate and then up at me. He took a step back eyeing the chains. I knew what he was thinking. Was there a way that I might have done it? He would soon learn what lay in the shadows of the old ship.

He left me and his dead shipmate. I was alone again. The rush of watching the man die was gone; replaced by emptiness. It never lasted long. It is what drove me to find death, seek it out and if necessary make it happen.

After what seemed like an eternity, hanging there in dark, the Captain walked through the door. He looked up at me and studied me, seeing if I would give him any clues as to what had happened. I answered him with a cold stare. I had warned them when they took me, but he didn't listen then, and now it was too late to ask and the captain knew it.

He motioned for the two men standing outside the room to collect the body. I wondered if he knew that this would not be the last body he threw overboard. He never took his eyes off of me. I could see the anger in his eyes. He desperately wanted to blame me for the death.

"It was slow." I said, but the captain did not respond. He was strong, much stronger than any of his crew, but that would not matter when he faced the shadow.

The captain stepped backwards out the room, slowly closing the door as he went. There was a pause and then I heard a click as he locked door.

For days the door did not open. I had no food, no water and saw no one. For three days, I just hung in the shadows swaying as the boat rocked with the waves. On the fourth day there was a scuffle with the guard outside my room. Another was lost to the shadows.

After they found the body the captain checked in on me. He threw a plate of food on the floor and smiled as I looked down at the plate.

"If you can reach them you can have them." he said.

I did not struggle against the chains, I did not beg him to bring it to me. I would not show weakness; I was stronger than he was and the fool was just starting to see the truth. They should have never come after me. The Captain thought he knew what I was, but how could he know when I did not?

The next morning the captain returned to find me still chained. However, the plate was empty. He looked up at me and I smiled back.

"The shadow will not spare you because you offer me food. This has just begun." His eyes narrowed to slits and his hand trembled. He started to reach for his sword before he regained his control and stopped.

"I will see that you pay for your crimes." he said and turned to leave the room.

"And claim the reward," I replied, "will it be enough to pay for the men you're going to lose?" He slammed the door shut.

Every day for the next week the crew dwindled. The door to the room never opened. No news did they bring me, but the bodies as they splashed against the water. In a few more days he would not have enough men to crew the ship.

After another week the door opened and captain walked in. He walked with a limp. He was hunched over. His cloths were not kept and they were torn. His face was stained with blood.

“I don’t know how you did it.” I smiled at him and I could see his anger turn to rage.

“So it is just you and I left. You had to know this was coming.”

Standing just a few feet from me, he drew his sword; the blade was stained with blood. He said nothing as he raised the blade over me and prepared to strike.

Two weeks later land was in sight. I stood on deck the sea air blowing through my hair. The boat sailed smoothly across the water, towards the rocks that surrounded the harbor. They would forever wonder what happened on the ship. The boat would not sink completely in the shallows. They would find no one on board; no bodies of the crew and no captain’s log. They had all been taken by the shadow.