

ANY PORT IN A STORM

Written by Melyssa G. Sprott

It was Melia's first cruise on an ocean liner. Actually, it was her first time on any seafaring vessel. She was deathly afraid of water, especially that far away from land; yet here she was on a honeymoon cruise to some remote tropical island. Her new husband, Ricky talked her into it.

While on their way to their honeymoon suite Ricky assured her that all would be fine. The likelihood of sinking or encountering some life threatening disaster at sea was slim. Melia didn't believe him and she couldn't help but feel there was some impending doom. She really thought they were going to drown.

Melia couldn't shake the feeling that she had been here before, maybe in another life. On this ship, in this corridor; in this cabin. She must have had a faraway look in her eyes because Ricky took her hand and calmly said, "Come on, we can go back topside and enjoy the scenery."

"No, I want to stay in our suite for a while. I think I feel kind of sick," she answered more sharply than she had intended.

As Ricky left the cabin, Melia called for room service. She thought it would be a good idea to have a romantic dinner with her new husband. "Wow," she thought, *"I am finally Mrs. Ricky Colton. Melia Colton. Mrs. Colton."*

She was shaken from her pleasant thoughts by a very deep vibration and a loud thunderous crash. Melia screamed. She got up to leave her cabin to search for her new husband but the door was jammed. Suddenly, Melia couldn't breathe. She was panicking. She kicked and clawed at the door until it came loose.

Once out in the corridor Melia noticed that she was alone. All she could hear was the obvious sounds of a storm. The ship was being tossed about, so was she. As she climbed the stairs to

the deck she saw that the sky was pitch black. Ricky was nowhere to be seen. Neither was anyone else.

Waves crashed higher. The storm raged with such unbelievable ferocity. Melia couldn't recall ever feeling so scared. She peered over the side of the ship to see if anyone was in the water. She saw nothing. She decided she better explore the ship and see if there were any passengers other than her aboard. That turned out to be a mistake.

Armed with only a kitchen knife, Melia searched every room on every deck. There didn't appear to be any other passengers. One secluded cabin, perhaps used for storage, looked like a tornado went through it and the door was covered in scratches and what looked like teeth marks. As she was passing by a string of passenger cabins she heard a low moan. The moan became a growl. Unexpectedly, the lights went out.

"Oh no, oh my God! The ship lost power. Now what?" Melia whispered to herself.

The moaning growl came closer. Melia screamed and tried to feel her way back to her room, but she tripped over something. It was wet. The moaning was next to her. Survival instincts took over, Melia started swinging her kitchen knife wildly while screaming, "Get away from me!"

The growl became a yelp and the yelping ran down the corridor, but not before lightning crashed. What Melia saw in the flash of light was the most horrifying sight she had ever seen. She had tripped over a dead body. It looked like one of the cabin boys who had brought her and Ricky's bags to their suite. Melia had never screamed so loud in her entire life.

As she looked up at the creature she saw that it was a man, or at least it used to be. His body was twisted and contorted. The creature's face was mangled and covered in blood. The mouth was full of razor sharp teeth that looked like they belonged to a shark. It appeared to be walking on all fours. The arms were bent in more places than just at the elbows and wrists. The legs were twisted and bent in unnatural positions.

The creature's frame looked like it had been hit by a truck and ran over a few times, yet these contortions seem to aid its movement. *Like it was a freak of evolution.* All was dark again.

Melia had to get off this ship or she was going to die trying. The ship was being slammed by waves and whipped by rain. Even if she could survive this storm she knew she couldn't survive an encounter with the grotesque creature. God forbid, there might even be more of them.

As she tried to make her way back to her cabin, she felt a sticky wetness along the wall. Melia didn't want to think about what it might be. Lightning flashed again, this time lighting up the whole corridor. There were mutilated corpses everywhere. Blood dripped from the walls and hung in clots of organ matter. Melia could not help vomiting. She thought that she may have seen a few of the dead begin to move. *How could something that was so obviously dead be moving?* Melia assumed it was just the thrashing of the ship. Regardless, for a moment she considered jumping overboard.

With every flash of lightning, she knew she was getting closer to her cabin. There was a muffled moan from behind her and a dragging noise. Melia turned in time to see that a whole mob of those creatures was coming towards her. Some were dragging bodies that they were still in the process of devouring. They were all at different stages of mutation. They were coming fast. Running at top speed she realized that she was about ten doors away from her room. She dove for it. When she looked up, the creatures had gone. Maybe in their frenzy for food they hadn't noticed her.

Crying, Melia barricaded herself in her honeymoon suite. While trying to figure out her next move she heard a scraping on her door followed by an eerie gurgled moan, "Melia, baby please let me in before they come back."

It was Ricky. He sounded like he was on Death's doorstep. How could he have survived an encounter those horribly mutated creatures? Something didn't seem right. Melia

unblocked the door. She turned the handle, took a deep breath and she opened the door.

"Ricky, honey is that you?" she whispered.

She opened the door just a crack. Cautiously, she peered out. With a wet sounding smack, Ricky slammed his hand on the wall just inside the door. Melia couldn't believe that he was alive. She didn't know whether to be alarmed or relieved. Melia cried as she helped him inside and cleaned his wounds. The deep gash across his throat scared her the most, though it didn't bleed much.

Ricky seemed to be alright. He told Melia that he had somehow evaded death at the hands of the mutated shark-creatures. He described how their mouths looked almost human, until they wanted to open them, at which point the mouth and jaw seemed to spread and open like a snake allowing the creatures to eat the head off of an adult male; a sight that Ricky himself had witnessed.

Melia was so happy to see that Ricky was okay that she kissed him. That one small kiss led to other more passionate things. He felt how soft her skin was, she saw in his eyes how he felt about her. Despite all the chaos around them, they were happily in love.

They dressed and decided to head for the captain's quarters. Perhaps there would be some clues to surviving this ordeal in there. Melia looked out into the corridor. She saw no one. There was a mutated crewman was above her on the ceiling crawling like a spider. Shrieking, Melia ran for the captain's cabin. Ricky was right behind her but he was starting to change. Melia heard the sound of bones twisting and snapping followed by Ricky's agonizing screams. "I love you. Melia, go," Ricky uttered his last human words.

She narrowly missed a swipe of the crewman's claws. Ricky had him by the leg. Ricky was one of them now. The two creatures fought while Melia ran to the captain's cabin. Maybe she would find a radio and call for help.

All the while the ship was being tossed this way and that. Lightning crashed again. Once inside the captain's cabin she saw bloody handprints but no corpses. That was a plus. She locked the door and lit a lantern with some nearby matches. Melia moved everything that wasn't nailed down in front of the door. She looked around. The radio was smashed to pieces. There was no way to get help.

She wanted to find a weapon of some sort, anything to fend the hideous mutations off. While looking through the desk drawers she noticed some notes the captain had scribbled down:

27 September– It started with Miguel. After our last passenger pick up he and Enrique caught a strange looking little shark. It was twisted and had extra fins, claws too. It looked like a science project or something. Never seen anything like it before. It could walk.

While still on the fishing line, it ran at Miguel and bit his arm. Enrique had to kill it to get it to turn Miguel loose. He was bleeding profusely, so Enrique wrapped Miguel's arm and held it tightly.

It wasn't long before Miguel was unconscious. Enrique and I moved him to the infirmary. We went in to check in on him twenty minutes later and we noticed that his arm looked deformed, though it hadn't been broken in the attack.

Enrique sat next to Miguel on the cot and no sooner than he blinked Miguel was tearing at him like he was out of his mind. Scratching, biting. There was blood everywhere.

Now, it seems that every hour another crewmate is feeling "ill". I have the sick crew restrained and quarantined in a spare cabin. I will get them to a hospital as soon as we get to port.

God help me if any of the passengers finds out or becomes infected. Whatever this illness is, it changes its victims. They grow sharp teeth, their limbs contort,

some have fins. I don't know if the restraints will hold. I am sure the door will.

As soon as we reach the island I will have my crew treated, if they can be helped. I hope it is not too late.

"I bet all the thrashing from the storm jarred the cabin door open holding the sick crewmembers. The whole ship is either dead or has mutated into one of those things," Melia said under her breath, "I am not going to die on this ship."

She needed a plan. *Easier said than done.* Those things could probably swim. If she couldn't find a way to kill them, they could destroy the population. She wasn't sure if there even was a way to kill them. *Maybe it was the end of the world.* Melia went to the captain's supply closet and gathered a flare gun, some prepackaged foods and bottled water, first aid kit, and a spare lantern. After placing the items in a bag, she put on a life jacket.

The ship thrashed hard. Melia went flying and slammed into a wall. She hated the water. She thought back to when she when she was ten years old;

Her family went camping out by Lake Marlow. The day started off like any other, breakfast cooked over an open flame, her older brother chasing her around the woods, tossing the baseball to each other; normal, happy family fun. Until the baseball went into the water. The lake wasn't even supposed to be that deep. Trevor dove off the deck as Melia watched laughing. Mom and Dad were laughing, too. Trevor never came back up. He drowned. The strongest and bravest person she had ever known had drowned.

The storm was raging. Melia began to panic again. The water killed her brother and now the water threatened to kill her. *Yeah, if those things didn't get her first.* She thought about finding a lifeboat. The creatures seemed to be half shark. In an open lifeboat she would be a sitting duck. If only there were a way to get the ship to port; *any port.* All she had to do was stay alive until they reached shore, but then what? With the radio

busted there was no way to warn anyone about the creatures.

The power flickered back on but was dim, could have been a back up generator. She wasn't sure and didn't care. Melia continued to go through the supply closet. She found some fishing equipment; spears, harpoons, nets. She also found a revolver and some ammunition. Melia was exhausted from her ordeal and from losing Ricky to hideous mutation. She decided she would try to rest, maybe she could come up with a plan after she had some time to recharge. As she drifted off to sleep she began to dream:

It was nine months from now, somehow Melia had survived. She was in a hospital getting ready to deliver Ricky's baby. The only piece of him that was left in this world. After some rough pushing and hard work, the baby's head was out. A few moments later the baby was delivered, but horribly deformed. Her face was adorable; a perfect mixture of Melia and Ricky, until she opened her mouth. It became twice the normal size and was filled with rows of tiny shark teeth. It was a baby girl with a shark tail and fins for arms. The doctor was still in dismay over the sight of the creature when the baby bit three of his fingers off.

Melia jerked awake. The storm continued to rage. She looked out the window; all was still dark, save for the occasional flashes of lightning. Melia regretted consummating her marriage after Ricky's encounter with the creatures. *What if he had gotten her pregnant?* A loud thunder crash caught her off guard and she jumped.

If she could get all the creatures to follow her to the lower decks of the ship she might be able to trap them there. During the tour of the ship she noticed a large sliding gate on each deck near the stairways that lead to the next deck up. Getting them all to follow her would be easy. She would need blood. They were as attracted to fresh blood as sharks were in the water.

Using the captain's letter opener, Melia made a three inch cut on her forearm just deep enough for blood to flow. She moved everything away from the door. "Time for the college

track team to pay off," she thought as she opened the door.

She ran up the stairs and went topside. Jogging at first, she went in large circles. The longer she ran, the more creatures were behind her and the faster she had to run. By the time the majority of the creatures were behind her, she was almost running at top speed. As if it wasn't hard enough to keep up the pace, Melia also had to try to keep her balance with the ship thrashing around.

Descending each deck to the next was tricky. The creatures could climb the walls and drop down almost on top of her. They were bloodthirsty and they were fast. She really wondered how she had already made it to the bottom passenger deck.

With a sudden rush of adrenaline, Melia ran faster than she had ever run before and went out the gate, she slammed it and locked it in a matter of milliseconds. She would have to run the distance of the passenger cabins and make it to the other side before the creatures got wise and turned around. Melia was tired and could feel herself slowing down.

By the time she got back to the gate, one of the creatures was standing there and then another. They were moving very slowly, they were preparing to attack. Melia got them to follow her in a circle until she was standing near the gate. She slammed and locked it just before the rest of them could get out.

Quietly and calmly Melia cupped her hand just under her bleeding wound. When the creatures moved close enough she splashed the blood on them. The mutant shark-creatures attacked each other instead of Melia. This gave her the opportunity to run one deck up and lock that gate. She was so worn out, the gate felt miles away.

Finally, she made it. After locking the gate she went and locked every gate on all the decks between her and them. Once finished she headed back to the captain's cabin. The storm was settling down a little. Melia opened the bag of items she had gathered earlier and bandaged her arm. She picked up the

revolver, it was loaded. Melia put it in the waistband of her pants and barricaded the door again. *No sense in taking any unnecessary chances.* Waves were still crashing. She had no idea what time it was. Melia dosed off on the captain's bed.

Everything was so peaceful. Melia was walking in a meadow. Sun shining, birds chirping, her hair flowing in a gentle breeze. Out of nowhere, Ricky appeared. He was walking towards her with his arms out. He looked into her eyes. She loved him so much. His gaping neck wound was moving and there were more of them. Oh my God, they aren't wounds... they're GILLS!

Ricky took Melia's hands, "I love you, Melia. Kill me. Please, please, please kill me, Melia."

The clear blue sky gave way to a raging sea. Ricky was covered in blood. He lifted his claw and slashed her head off and began to feast on her.

Hours had passed by the time Melia woke from her nightmare. When she opened her eyes she saw that the storm was over and the sun was rising. The ship was dead silent. She looked out the window and saw that land was not far off.

Melia crept out of the captain's cabin, gun in hand. The corridor appeared to be empty. As she headed topside Ricky (*what used to be Ricky*) appeared out of nowhere. He must not have been following her before. He came closer. Judging by his movements and what Melia had already seen these creatures do, she knew he was going to kill her. He wasn't Ricky anymore. She loved him but she knew what she had to do. She raised the revolver just as Ricky was lunging at her. One bullet through the eye. He was dead. She hoped.

Readying the lifeboat, Melia lowered it and rowed to shore. She got immediate attention raving like a madwoman about mutated shark-creatures. After bringing the ship to port, local authorities boarded the vessel. They found all the gates locked, as Melia said they would. They found blood everywhere. What they didn't find was the mutations. No one believed her.

They all thought Melia was insane. Perhaps she was,

after what she had lived through. She was abruptly institutionalized. It was discovered not long after that Melia was pregnant. After months of psychotherapy and many nights in solitary Melia started to believe the police and the doctors: She had a psychotic break and killed everyone.

On a hot June morning, Melia went into labor with Ricky's baby. *The only piece of him that was left in this world.* After a few very hard hours of labor, the baby was delivered. A nurse screamed and fainted. "Is my baby okay?" Melia asked.

Melia's new baby girl had the most beautiful face; a perfect mixture of Melia and Ricky. Until she opened her mouth. It became twice the normal size and was filled with rows of tiny shark teeth. She had a shark tail instead of legs, clawed fins for arms, and gills in the side of her neck. The doctor was so shocked at the sight of the little creature, he practically threw her at Melia and then ran for help.

The baby tore her mother's face off and started to feed.

They believed Melia now, oh yes they did.