The Libertine

By

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IN:

EXT. SEA - DAY

Thunder growls and lightning flashes in vibrant contrast to an almost black sky.

SUPER: JULY 4TH, 1735

The sea swells, lifting a sloop high and then low. Red letters hastily painted on her bow read, ‘THE LIBERTINE’.

EXT. THE LIBERTINE - DAY

The low drop of the sail casts a dark shadow over CHRISTIAN (43) as he wrestles with the wheel, his scruffy white-patched beard affords little protection from the constant spray and salty bite of the sea.

His thin clothes soaked and hanging heavy about his large frame, HUGH (22) joins Christian at the wheel.

    HUGH  
    We need help, Pa.

    CHRISTIAN  
    They cost too much to waste them.  
    The good Lord will see us through.

Far skinnier and a couple years younger than Hugh, BRAD, shivers from the cold.

    BRAD  
    Can’t all just be plain bad luck  
    that nine good sailing men can  
    perish the way they did. There’s  
    something evil aboard.

Brad steadies himself as the sloop rises and falls with the heavy swell.

    HUGH  
    Those slaves have been nothing but  
    bad luck since we got ‘em.

    CHRISTIAN  
    I’ll not hear any of that shit.

    BRAD  
    Which one of us is next?
CHRISTIAN
You shut that mouth, boy. They ain’t had it easy neither. Six of them are dead too.

HUGH
Least we can do is put ’em to work.

CHRISTIAN
(grunts acquiescence)
Leave the female be.

INT. BELOW DECK – DAY

The wind roars, crashing huge waves against the sides of the boat, making the wood creak under the strain.

Hugh lights a candle and waits for his eyes to adjust to the gloom. He waves the flame across three black captives, each chained at the ankle.

HUGH
We need help.
(nods upwards)
Up on deck.

A smile permanently scarred into his face, JEREMIAH (23), his skinny body clothed in crudely sewn-together rags, rises quickly, pulling the chain tight.

JEREMIAH
I’m Jeremiah, suh. Happy to help.

Jeremiah glances nervously toward, MCHAWI (19), she’s delicately built and dressed in rags. Her eyes are closed and her underdeveloped chest barely rises as she breathes.

Chained next to her, ASKARI (31), muscular and wearing a leather skirt, rests his head on his arms that in turn rest atop his bent knees.

HUGH
Your English is good.

JEREMIAH
I been taken before. They... let me go. A free man, suh.

HUGH
Escaped, more like.
JEREMIAH
(disarming grin)
No, suh. Never, suh. No.

Hugh pulls a musket from his waistband.

HUGH
You best know, I shoot straight and true... every time.

Hugh pulls a key from his pocket and tosses it.

Jeremiah catches it and hastily removes the manacle from his ankle before moving to Askari and doing the same.

HUGH
Leave the girl. She’s too weak to be worth a shit.

Hugh ushers Jeremiah and Askari up the creaky stairway that leads above deck.

JEREMIAH
(whispers)
It’s the girl, suh. We must throw her over.

HUGH
Why?

JEREMIAH
She’s a... witch.

HUGH
Yeah, well we don’t believe in no witches. Not on this trip.

Hugh glances at Mchawi before ushering Jeremiah and Askari above deck.

EXT. THE LIBERTINE - DAY

The storm continues.

Christian holds the wheel still with one hand until Hugh takes it from him.

CHRISTIAN
I’ll show these boys the ropes.
How’s the girl?
HUGH
She don’t look right. I don’t think she’ll survive the trip. Here.

Hugh holds the wheel and offers Christian the musket.

CHRISTIAN
I got no need of that. These boys will behave themselves.
(turns to Jeremiah and Askari)
Ain’t that so?

JEREMIAH
That’s so, masser.

CHRISTIAN
You speak English?

JEREMIAH
Yes, suh.

CHRISTIAN
What about him?

JEREMIAH
I can talk to him for you, suh.

CHRISTIAN
Translate?

JEREMIAH
Yes, suh. Translate, suh.

CHRISTIAN
You didn’t say you could speak English back at the slave market.

JEREMIAH
I seen you was a good man, suh. I didn’t want to put the price up.

CHRISTIAN
Ah, they charge more because you speak English. Makes sense. Then I owe you a thank you.

Christian smiles broadly and leads Jeremiah and Askari away.

Hugh wrestles with the wheel and frowns at the sea ahead.

Brad heads below deck.
HUGH
(over sudden crash of sea)
Brad!

Brad doesn’t hear him and continues down.

Christian shields his eyes from the salty bite of the sea as Askari climbs up into the sails.

CHRISTIAN
(shouts against howl of the wind)
Make sure it’s tied tight.

Christian looks to his right and finds Jeremiah standing next to him, his grin giving him the appearance of Death.

CHRISTIAN
Where’d you get to?

JEREMIAH
Been right here all along, suh.

Christian frowns and looks up into the rigging.

CHRISTIAN
Wait here. Make sure he don’t panic. Fall from there will kill him. You understand?

Lightning strikes, illuminating Jeremiah’s grin.

JEREMIAH
I hear you, suh.

Jeremiah watches Christian walk away and then turns his grin to the rigging.

Hugh wrestles with the wheel as Christian approaches.

HUGH
(nods toward lower deck)
Better check on Brad.

Christian snarls in response and storms below deck.

INT. BELOW DECK - DAY

Christian finds Mchawi naked, her knees curled up to her all-too visible ribs.
CHRISTIAN
Where is he?

She stares at him, her eyes wide with terror.

CHRISTIAN
Where are your clothes?

Christian looks around and finds nothing. Shouts from above deck take his attention.

CHRISTIAN
What is it now?

EXT. THE LIBERTINE - DAY

High in the rigging, Askari shouts and points at the water. Christian joins Jeremiah who looks up at Askari, the grin plastered across his face.

CHRISTIAN
What’s he yapping about?

JEREMIAH
He says, there’s something in the water, suh.

Christian moves to the side and peers into the murk.

Something floats. A flash of lightning, and Brad’s dead face stares up at him.

Christian recoils in horror.

A scream from the rigging. Askari plummets to the deck with a sickening squelch and the crack of multiple bones. His breaths come hard, slow, and very deliberate, fading until, eventually, they stop.

Christian drags Jeremiah to where Hugh steers the ship.

HUGH
What is it?

CHRISTIAN
Brad’s gone over.

HUGH
What?

Hugh looks at Jeremiah who grins at him.
CHRISTIAN
(to Jeremiah)
Hold that.

Christian forces Jeremiah to hold the ship’s wheel.

HUGH
Which side’s he at?

Hugh grabs a long wooden pole with a hook on the end.

JEREMIAH
It’s the girl, suh. She’s a witch.

Christian frowns before hurrying to join Hugh.

Hugh hooks Brad’s corpse and drags it to the side of the boat where Christian helps haul him onto the deck.

In tears, Christian holds Brad in his arms.

HUGH
Still think your God is going to get us through this?

Christian’s face changes from anger to hatred.

CHRISTIAN
That fucking whore.

Christian stands and hurries below deck.

HUGH
We don’t know it’s her, Pa.

Hugh stares into Brad’s glassy eyes until a scream draws his attention away.

Christian drags a screaming, terrified Mchawi by her hair toward the side of the boat.

Lightning strikes and Hugh catches Jeremiah’s broad grin as he loosely holds the wheel.

HUGH
It’s you.

Christian lets go of Mchawi as Hugh charges toward Jeremiah. Jeremiah sees him coming and backs away.
JEREMIAH
No, suh. No, suh.

Hugh sees red.

HUGH
It was you all along.

Hugh backs Jeremiah to the side of the boat and pulls back his fist.

Christian grabs Hugh’s arm.

CHRISTIAN
It ain’t him.

Hugh shoves him away as the boat is hit by a huge wave and Christian loses balance, falls, and hits his head.

Hugh stares in horror as a pool of blood grows around Christian’s head. He turns menacingly to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah shakes with fear and sobs.

JEREMIAH
No, suh. Not me, suh.

Jeremiah stares at something behind Hugh and, despite his anger, something makes him turn too.

Her eyes completely white, Mchawi latches onto Hugh’s chest, her legs wrap tightly around his waist.

Jeremiah scuttles away as Hugh’s screams accompany a sudden roar of thunder.

INT. BELOW DECK - DAY

In the dark, Jeremiah kneels in a corner, his hands to his mouth, attempting to stifle panicked sobs.

MCHAWI (OS)
(whispers)
Jeremiuuuuuuuiah.

Jeremiah shakes his head - a silent denial of the undeniable. His eyes grow wide, and then...

...he is snatched into the darkness.

OUT.