

Excerpt from **THE KEYS OF THE WATCHMEN** by Kathleen C. Perrin

**I WAS SURPRISED AT** how unbelievably stupid my captors were. First of all, they'd spoken openly in my presence about Constable Collins' plans to invade the mount and secondly, although my hands and feet were bound, they hadn't secured me to the bunk. I guess they weren't used to females who actually fought for their lives—or their honor. When I managed to sit up and shake the unattached hood from off my head, I saw that I was in what was probably the captain's quarters. One of those three fools actually had to be the captain of this ship. And England was winning this war?

Although there was no artificial light source in the room, enough sunlight filtered in through the port-hole for me to see. The night was over, and that meant the tide was heading back in. I had no time to lose.

I gagged as I looked at the soiled muslin shirt on me, which hit about mid-thigh. It was disgusting enough to think those gorillas had seen me naked, but it was even more disgusting to be wearing the filthy garment that had belonged to someone who had died of the bloody flux. My first order of business was to cut through my bindings so I could find something less repulsive to wear.

Raspy-Voice was probably the captain. He'd spoken with the most authority, and Toothless Phillip had addressed him as 'sir.' Yeah, I wasn't real thrilled to exchange Mr. Thompson's shirt for a garment belonging to Raspy-Voice, but it was better than being naked. And it was better than the bloody flux. I had no time to waste before the captain or one of his flunkies came to check on me.

I hopped over to the table where they'd been playing cards. There was nothing on it except a heavy pewter candlestick, so Captain Raspy-Voice had obviously scooped up the cards and his winnings and hidden them somewhere. I looked around and saw several built-in drawers. It was awkward, but even with my hands and feet bound, it wasn't that hard to open the captain's drawers. At least the unlocked drawers.

In the first drawer I opened, I actually found the net bag with my shower pouf, shampoo and soap intact. It wasn't what I was looking for, but I was glad to reclaim it. It only took me about five minutes more to find what I was really looking for. Actually, it was calling my name: "Katelyn, Katelyn, I'm in here."

And there it was: a razor-sharp dagger with a decorative silver hilt, shoved in a drawer with what looked like log books. The knife was probably war booty because I didn't think Raspy-Voice could afford such a piece. Museum-quality. It was now *my* museum-quality piece, taken as payment for that sucker punch from Toothless!

I heard scuffling above me, and my heart dropped to my feet but I didn't stop sawing away at the cords. After another few minutes, I had both my hands and legs freed. Then I searched the cabin, looking for something moderately clean to wear. Finally, I found a drawer full of folded linens, inner garments that appeared to be freshly laundered. Or as laundered as things could be in the fifteenth century.

As much as I despised putting on anything that had touched Raspy-Voice's body, I pulled out a clean linen shirt. I immediately removed the soiled shirt trying to touch it as little as possible. Then I folded it with the very tips of my index fingers and thumbs. I got a great deal of satisfaction from placing it in the bottom of Raspy-Voice's underwear drawer. The deceased Mr. Thompson was also happy to return the favor.

Before pulling on the shirt, I cut its sleeves with the dagger so they'd hit the middle of my upper arms, and then I ripped about a foot of fabric off the bottom. I didn't want to expose too much of my body, but I knew I'd need to move without restriction. The truth was that I'd very probably be swimming for my life. The entire ship started creaking and I began to sway back and forth as the ship's speed picked up. I had to hurry.