

S.R. RUARK



A SONG FOR
THE DEAD

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First Edition published April 2020
By Indies United Publishing House, LLC

Cover Art: LisaBook

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ISBN: 978-1-64456-131-7



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC
P.O. BOX 3071
QUINCY, IL 62305-3071
www.indiesunited.net

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CHAPTER 1



Lauranya sat at her desk, willing the math to work as she wanted it to, not how it was. There was a yacht in the warehouse. She had seen it while packing supplies she and Arie would need to live in the tower. She had originally nixed the idea for living on a yacht as she had minimal skills at operating a boat of any sort. Now, she looked at all the papers wishing she could breathe water and/or knew how to sail.

A small sob escaped. More threatened to pour out. Lauranya shoved her anger and fear into a mental box, slamming it closed only to be opened at another date.

The Gods' boat was in the warehouse which was less than 40 yards away, straight across. The dive from the building was over a hundred feet down. She didn't have the supplies to build a diving suit or air canisters from which to breathe. And if she did have diving canisters, she didn't have a pressure chamber after the swim through water reclaimed forest, a pitch black warehouse to a ship that was probably no longer movable, that would have to be raised from the depths.

She slammed the desk with all the force in her arm. Nails shifted from human to claw then back again. The table groaned and creaked from the force she used. Her hand ached from flesh hitting metal.

"Damn you, Illig. I will roast your tail over coals if I ever see you again!" Lauranya snarled, clutching the hand to her chest, tears forming in her eyes. She shook her head furiously at her impotence.

"A ship. Damn it. I need a ship." Lauranya took a deep breath going back to her computer pad. "Something to float on, something to steer and sail. Easy enough, yes? If I have the supplies." She muttered entering her query into her laptop.

The water vessels showing on the query were all Noble or higher. Yachts or racing rigs. Beautiful but overdone. Completely outside of what she could build with materials on hand. Lauranya stared blankly at the screen trying to reconcile the images to her needs. Her brain was not merging the two different visual and mental images.

"Wait. New search for primitive vessels." Her fingers flashed across the keyboard.

The screen re-imaged. This time bringing up a ship called a canoe. A single hull that needed only a paddle. She could make this with items on hand. As she read of this type of boat, she saw a fatal flaw. The design was simple but not sturdy for deep waters, to easy to tip in any kind of wave action. She felt hot tears prickle behind her eyelids, again.

The screen scrolled down a few more images. She stopped on one. This image had a flat spot for a person or persons to sit with a wide base and three sets of supports under the base. The description said the design was proven reliable over great distances on open water; however, the screen cautioned against this form of transport as not practical on water worlds as transportation. Lauranya frowned before reading on. Slaves will use the base design eluding Overseers to remote, outlying unpopulated areas as the rigging was so sturdy and easy to build.

“Huh.” Was all she said, sitting up, tilting her head as she examined this photo several times. Lauranya chewed her lip, thinking of how to make a lightweight platform for her to sit on. A table? Any of the wooden doors? Ripping up flooring? What she needed would have to be sturdy enough to hold her weight, the weight of her supplies and still able to handle the stress of flexing when the trireme shifted directions over water. And be able to handle Arie’s weight for the return trip.

“Stop.” She whispered. “Calculate how to keep the trireme afloat with variants in weight and tilting! Arie needs us.” she calculated square footage with estimated weight to buoyancy needed.

There was a moment of connection on what she had that would work without too many extra materials needed for the body. The anti-grav sled would float over water. She had empty plastic barrels that had held grain in the downstairs spare room; she could seal for ballast. The pallet could be lashed over the barrels for a flat area with the extra arm being supplied from a stripped down metal couch frame. Another frame could be disassembled with the long back used for the central sail pole.

Lauranya hid behind calculations and supplies on hand for the few minutes until her heart stopped pounding and her hands stopped shaking.

“Empty barrels with their plugs glued down to keep airtight, Wire for metal frames. A rest for me and a box with supplies and food. A sail and a rudder.” Her list, short for so important a project, had only a double handful of items needed. Gathering everything up, carrying everything to the roof to be assembled took less time than expected. The building took her longer. A rotating T cuff slid over the “mast” for the boom with a tarp connected with loose loops hooking the edges over the mast and boom. A rope, made of ripped then braided sheets, so she could pull the sail taught or loosen as needed. The sun had crept further into the sky.

Lauranya sat up, using the bottom edge of her chest wrap to wipe the sweat off her forehead, looking over her construction.

“It certainly looks slave made.” She said with an air of wary optimism.

“Slave construction usually doesn’t equal free or artisanal.” Jacks commented with a ghostly judgmental sniff.

“Be quiet unless you have something useful to add!” She snapped at the family haunt. “If a slave’s life depends on something working, the damn thing will not only work but will be 5 times better than the artisanal one that only has to last one worldship season for a master’s pleasure.”

She gathered up the tools and glue, heading inside to gather the perishables.

Jacks floated behind her, ignored in her anger. She didn't see him wringing opaque hands at her rebuke.

A container to drink from was the first thing she grabbed. A plastic jar for pickled eggs. Dried fruits in another plastic container. Parched grains mixed with honey and spices in a third. A week's worth of food, nothing that needed refrigeration or cooking. Another change of clothes. Lastly, a small container of soap.

Everything fit in the small 2x2x2 box, even the clothes once she packed them in the small pockets between the supplies she needed. The box's wooden feet she screwed into the metal floor of the anti grav sled. She lashed the lid down tightly with found leather cording.

"Now for the hard part." Lauranya breathed out, her stomach fluttered. The next step was the commitment part. Once she was over the edge of the building, there was no coming back.

She found the spool of rubber hose she and Arie hadn't used for the mirrors. Lauranya had been saving it for a future task. It was 160 feet long, and the future need was now. She touched the spool reverently before saying a soft prayer. "This would never have been enough for the mirrors. Thank you Osumare for the forethought of frugality."

At the trireme, she pulled the rubber hose from the spool tying the end to the metal undercarriage of the trireme. The rest of the tubing, she ran around the building's generator, that was bolted to the rooftop floor. She held the spool in her left hand, feeding out the hose as she walked backward to the trireme with her right.

"Now things get interesting." She wrapped the tubing around her torso in a crisscross over her shoulders dropping the spool behind her. She made sure there was plenty of slack in the line still left.

She lifted one edge of the hovering "trireme" to the top of the parapet. Then the other front edge, both back edges still on the floor. Bending at the knees, Lauranya lifted the back edge of the trireme feeling the muscles of her back, her legs and arms protesting but the trireme moved onto the parapet, balanced precariously. Lauranya grabbed for the tubing as the trireme reached its tilting point. It went over the side with breathtaking speed. The line pulled through her hands, so fast skin ripped off her palms until she gripped it tightly with fingers clamped tight. Once she closed her fingers, trying to slow the downward motion, gravity and the weight of the trireme slammed her into the parapet. The line tightened around her chest while knocking the breath out of her. Gasping with her mouth open, sounding almost more scream like than breathing, Lauranya braced her feet against the wall, feeding the tubing foot by foot until there was no more slack. The line went taught then stopped. Lauranya stepped backward slowly, letting the line pull her towards the generator.

"You shouldn't be able to do that." Jacks commented.

"Do... what?" Panted Lauranya, the skin on her hands already healing from the friction burn.

“Keep the tubing from yanking you off your feet and into the wall. The force of the drop with the weight of the trireme is more than a normal human can handle even with using the generator as a fulcrum.” The ghostly voice held awe and curiosity, an even mix.

“Jacks, you are not helping me.” Lauranya gritted her teeth, digging her heels in with each step walking towards the parapet slowly, controlled. The stones were rough on the bottom of her soles, pulling little bits of skin off with each step.

The trireme slid onto the water before Lauranya reached the edge, a few inches to spare. She sagged against the low wall, drenched in sweat.

“And gently down.” She unwrapped the remaining tubing from her chest, tying it to a planter. The trireme with the sail down wouldn’t be going anywhere quickly.

“Are you sure...” Jacks started as she climbed over the wall and onto the window washer's platform.

“I do not have a choice Jacks. I have to save my child.” Lauranya looked towards the setting sun, brushing strands of hair out of her face. A breeze from the east teased around them, warm and lover gentle.

Lauranya ran back inside the tower for a last-minute round of to-do. She set drip irrigation for the plants, closed all the doors on the upper levels to keep the chickens from wandering everywhere and setting up new laying spots. The feeding stations she filled. Each one would feed the birds for five days at a time. The plants and bugs, inside, would be fair game or fairer game. She opened the cages to give the birds roaming space.

Lauranya took a moment to look around her home. “Arie is alive and we will be back.” She said this aloud, letting her voice fill the room. A prayer or a command, she didn’t know which. She ignored the fear she heard echoed back. Then she headed to the rooftop.

“There are still hours of daylight. I am not that far behind.” Desperation forcing her to keep hope alive.

Jacks leaned over to kiss her cheek. “Yemoja’s blessing on you.”

“Pray to Olokun as well, please.” Lauranya touched a ghostly cheek with a finger, giving her friend a smile, anger, and annoyance forgiven. “When Obatala brings us together again.”

She slid over the parapet and onto the platform. Gaining her balance, she tugged the platform ropes downwards in slow steady pulls, until the trireme was only a long step away. She took that step.

Lauranya didn’t look up, so she didn’t see Jacks hovering over the parapet watching, waving good-bye. She sat on the box, bolted to the floor, getting a feel for this new craft she pinned all her hopes on. The sail filled with the playful breeze, moving forward with a quick leap. Lauranya gripped the sail line a little tighter, grabbing the trireme floor with her toes as she moved towards the setting sun.

y.

Cnaeu guided Felix gently to a chair, covering him with a blanket before heading over to the drink dispenser. His hand only shook slightly while punching in a sweet fruit juice selection.

Jacintha came up next to him, leaning casually on the counter as his drink poured. “He really under control?” Jacintha’s voice a whisper for his ears, her eyes on the frail looking necro.

“If he’s not, we’ll have to take care of him before he goes to insane.” Cnaeu’s fingers tapped a staccato rhythm on the counter.

“How likely?” she pressed.

“Ever worry about Hadriana?” Came the counter.

“Not like this.” She shook her head, blonde hair floating across her face. She pushed the annoying strands behind an ear.

Cnaeu took a sip. The drink tart and sweet, followed by a hint of bitter. He licked his lips before responding. “He’s never had this much freedom. Hoping it doesn’t go to his head.” They both knew he was admitting to possible failure.

“This plan depends on his sanity.” Jacintha brought up the obvious.

“It’s not the start I’m worried about. Afterward, when we have hundreds of bodies around us, that he might decide the dead are better than the living.”

“And if that happens?” She looked him in the eyes; her lips pressed tight.

“Then we’ll need to clean up our mess.” Cnaeu sighed, taking another sip.

Jacintha gave a snort. “Your necro, your mess.” Waiving a hand dismissively towards Felix and the future.

Cnaeu gave her a look over the rim of his metal mug. “Not helping.”

“Pfft. You know, I’ll be right there.” She flashed a smile. “Making sure to remind you of this mistake for the rest of your life.”

“If this is a mistake then you can remind me as much as you like.” A bright smile flashed briefly before he took another sip.

They bumped fists as Felix continued moving his hands randomly in front of him. A puppeteer pulling invisible strings.

About the Author

S.R. RUARK's interests are widely varied. So much so that when discussing different types of genres and subcultures; she is often asked which lane she's driving in. All she can say is that her lane is usually all over the map! Her stories are never just short stories. She has one, maybe two that she can/will call short, but even then they will end up being close to 75 page novellas. She keep a dream journal and a notebook just for one liners/off the cuff remarks because anything can and will be used! S.R. is an SCA enthusiast with a wide range of friends and interest including but not limited to fencing, dancing, cooking and reading anything not being sat on by a cat.

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