

“Tell No Tales” by Alex Sokol

First day on the ship. Hodge shows me around.

Here’s the mess deck. Here’s your rack. Your workspace, ragged Oscar flag hanging from the bulkhead. Your shipmates, Beltowski, Pierpoli. That’s forward, aft. Pronounced folk-sul, bosun. Watch your head!

Months go by. We cast off. So this is the ocean.

Get to work. Sign these papers as you perform maintenance. Pages and pages of autographs from the whole division. Who’s Clavin?

Ported in Iceland for a night. Didn’t touch land for a month after.

Soaked during supply ops in the Arctic Circle.

Blue Nose ceremony.

Downtime in the workspace. Game of Thrones. Mario Kart. How I Met Your Mother. That Oscar flag just hanging there.

Three days in Bruges. Best beer in the world.

Caught in a bad storm off Norway. Mast peeled the top off comms like a tin of sardines.

Week of maintenance in Spain. Who’d that sangria make me kiss?

Russian frigates tease us in the East Med.

We head home.

In line for chow talking to a rescue swimmer.

I’ve only been in the water to save one guy and he didn’t want to be saved. Swam straight down. Down down down. Never found him. Gave that Oscar flag to Hodge. Best friends, those two.

Clavin.

Damn you, Hodge. Beltowski. Pierpoli.

Why’d he do it? Why didn’t you tell me? Me, his replacement. Am I next? Cursed, aren’t I? One step behind the Black Robes! Tomorrow I’ll be swimming for deeper blue. Is that what you want?

Dog that thought.

Superstitious sailors don’t last long.