

Roll On, Roll On

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ONE.

Panel 1: A brig-rigged barque with a raised quarter deck, hove-to against a violent storm at night. The ship's colors (in the sense of a flag displaying her national origin) are not apparent. The clouds have pulled back a little from a full moon, casting an eerie light over the ship.

NO COPY

Panel 2: The deck, from the point of view of a person standing on it, facing aft. Lanterns no one had time to extinguish sway in the wind. A wave is receding from where it spilled over the quarter deck.

NO COPY

Panel 3: The waves return with renewed strength, plunging massive over the quarter deck, seconds from swallowing the observer.

NO COPY

TWO.

Panel 1: A different ship, this time a schooner with French colors. She's on fire.

NO COPY

Panel 2: A figure stands alone on deck, looking down into the water, face impassive. This is the PROTAGONIST. He is young, handsome, sharp-featured, and surprisingly pale considering his life at sea, almost ghostly.

NO COPY

Panel 3: Boards and bits of wood fall into the sea, still in flames.

NO COPY

THREE.

Panel 1: Inside a WWII submarine, the protagonist in Norwegian uniform and a few blurry, indistinct shipmates. Water is pouring in from above.

NO COPY

Panel 2: A mid-century oil tanker on fire.

NO COPY

Panel 3: A modern beach, just a spit of land beside a hospital. Appears to function as a break area for the hospital employees, there's a trash can and a couple weathered picnic tables. It's dark out, besides the lights from the distant city. The water is choppy.

NO COPY

Panel 4: The protagonist is standing barefoot on the beach in a lab coat, peering up at the sky. His clothes are modern, but aside from the lab coat, they could easily be mistaken for a sailor's slops - linen shirt, grey vest, loose pants with the legs rolled up. He looks a little different, face softer, rounder. He's wearing a scrimshaw albatross necklace.

NO COPY

FOUR.

Panel 1: A tall Black woman, MARTA, also wearing a lab coat, is smoking pensively just outside of the hospital, under an overhang. There's a NO SMOKING sign next to her, which she's never really noticed. She is not pretty.

NO COPY

Panel 2: She's turned to lean against one of the overhang's pillars, silently looking out towards the beach. Her back is towards the reader.

NO COPY

Panel 3: Same pose, except Marta's cupped her hand to her mouth, calling out towards the beach.

1. MARTA: Hey! Break's almost over!

2. MARTA: It's going to rain, come inside!

Panel 4: The protagonist is still fiercely staring into the sky.

NO COPY

Panel 5: He turns to go.

1. PROTAGONIST: Not today, then.

FIVE.

Panel 1: The protagonist is in the hospital laboratory, at a bench. He's feeding a liquid via pipette into a vial of Luria broth. Narrows his eyes at the drops. The panel is mostly centered on him, but Marta watches him over her shoulder.

NO COPY

Panel 2: A well-built guy who's just a shade uglier than ruggedly handsome, ED, comes through the door, hurriedly pulling on his lab coat.

1. ED: Back late. Sorry, not sorry.

Panel 3: A blonde woman (bottle blonde, she's well into middle age) at a nearby bench banters while Ed makes a face at the protagonist.

1. BLONDE COLLEAGUE: It's your first shift back from vacation and you're already screwing up. Great job, Ed.
2. ED: Yeah, yeah. Does anybody know why we have an old-timey sailor in the medical lab?

Panel 4: Marta, holding a blood agar plate containing *H. pylori*, steals a glance towards the protagonist, whose back is to them all, calmly continuing to work.

1. PROTAGONIST: Hey, I washed my hands.

Panel 5: Marta turns back to her work, smiling privately.

NO COPY

Panel 6: Ed goes over to harass the newcomer, who is significantly shorter than he is. He still can't get the protagonist to turn away from his work, though.

1. ED: No, for real. Why do you have an albatross around your neck?
2. PROTAGONIST: It's a reminder. Albatrosses are the souls of dead sailors. For a sailor to kill a sailor is to violate the natural law.
3. ED: Do you often have to stop yourself from killing birds and seamen?

SIX.

Panel 1: The blonde at the PCR machine glances over to them.

1. BLONDE COLLEAGUE: Leave her alone, Ed. Er, I mean...
2. BLONDE COLLEAGUE: Sorry, honey, are you a boy or a girl?

Panel 2: The protagonist tapping at his tube of broth to mix it.

1. PROTAGONIST: Depends on how you look at it.
2. ED: Well, what's on your driver's license?
3. PROTAGONIST: Male.
4. ED: Does it match what's in your pants?

Panel 3: Marta comes over to break it up. From here, we can see she's about Ed's height. Ed turns to skulk off.

1. MARTA: You know, I *can* go to HR.
2. ED: I'm just messing around! Real men can take jokes, right? - - Not you, Marta, I mean - -
3. MARTA: Just stop talking, Ed.

Panel 4: Marta leans on her elbow against the bench as the protagonist works, looking at him softly.

1. MARTA: My name's Marta.
2. PROTAGONIST: That's a fine name, Marta.

Panel 5: Marta keeps talking.

1. MARTA: ...So...what made you want to be a lab tech?
2. PROTAGONIST: I wanted to go into traveling, taking temporary positions whenever a laboratory is short a pair of hands. I'll only be on this assignment for another six weeks. Long before I can get tired of the place.
3. PROTAGONIST: It's the way of life that feels right to me.

SEVEN.

Panel 1: Marta touches her hair shyly.

1. MARTA: You know, this weekend, I'm...I was thinking maybe...

Panel 2: The protagonist faces her, finally. Same stony stare. It's impossible to know what he's thinking.

1. PROTAGONIST: I'm enough of a woman that you wouldn't want me aboard a ship.
2. PROTAGONIST: Are you all right with that?

Panel 3: A scatter of clothes on the ground, including a binder for a trans man and a gaff for a trans woman, and silicon breast forms inside of a lacy bra.

Panel 4: Marta props her head up in her hand, looking at the protagonist, who's lying face down in bed with her.

1. MARTA: Could you do something for me?
2. PROTAGONIST: I won't know how to answer that until you tell me what.

Panel 5: Marta tentatively touches his hair. The protagonist tolerates the touch without response.

1. MARTA: From the moment I first saw you, I thought...
2. MARTA: ...you look like you know secrets.
3. MARTA: Tell me one of them.

EIGHT.

Panel 1: Marta sits up, crossing her arms around her bare, flat chest, thinking, wistful.

1. PROTAGONIST: What kind of secret do you want?
2. MARTA: I just...Why are people born like you and me?
3. MARTA: I've always wondered it. And you seem like you know.

Panel 3: The pile of clothes. Tangled in them is the crude bone bird charm on a cord. There's a touch of red on its breast.

NO COPY

Panel 4: He sits up and looks at her, eyes grave.

1. PROTAGONIST: I don't know about you.
2. PROTAGONIST: In my case, I believe it was to protect people from me. I was given this body so that I'd finally understand I was a jinx.
3. PROTAGONIST: I had begun to suspect it, but I kept going to sea because I wanted to die that way.
4. PROTAGONIST: The sea was always willing to give me the death I asked for. It just didn't care if we took other people with me.

Panel 5: He closes his eyes, resting his head back against the headboard.

1. PROTAGONIST: I was loved too well.

Panel 6: Marta watches him.

1. MARTA: I'm not sure how much sense it'll make in the morning, but...
2. MARTA: ...right now, in the dark, alone with you...
3. MARTA: I think I understand.

NINE.

Panel 1: The moon, calm.

NO COPY

Panel 2: Marta is walking down the hall of the hospital with the protagonist.

1. MARTA: The lab director's been trying to make this position permanent for a dog's age. If you wanted, I could talk to him about -
2. PROTAGONIST: All right.

Panel 3: Marta's thrown off script.

1. MARTA: Um, if you have trouble finding someplace to rent, I don't have a roommate, so...
2. PROTAGONIST: All right.

Panel 4: Marta stops still, baffled. The protagonist keeps walking.

Panel 5: Marta stands on the little beach by the hospital. The ocean is calm, placid. She squints up at the sun, hand shading her eyes.

NO COPY

Panel 6: A lost expression on her face. Whatever she's looking for, she doesn't find it.

NO COPY

Panel 7: She turns to go.

NO COPY

TEN.

Panel 1: Establishing shot of a farmhouse, early morning. The sun sweeps over the flat land. Marta is in a grubby tshirt and her chores jeans, hanging up the laundry on a line. We can tell from the natural curves of her body that she's gone on HRT since last we saw her.

NO COPY

Panel 2: A little half Black boy, whose name is FRANCIS, is sitting at her feet on the ground playing with a toy truck.

1. FRANCIS: Hey, Mom?
2. MARTA: Hey, Francis?

Panel 3: Francis stares at the truck intently.

1. FRANCIS: Why doesn't Daddy ever look at me?

Panel 4: Marta gathers a new handful of clothes from the laundry basket.

1. MARTA: I'm sure he does. Probably when *you're* not looking.
2. FRANCIS: But have you ever seen him do it?

Panel 5: Francis hugs the toy, sulking. Marta kneels by him, gentle.

1. MARTA: Do you remember before grandpa died and we got his farm? You were stuck inside all day and there was always noise. Your daddy wouldn't have agreed to move out of the yucky city to a place where you could play if he didn't love you, Frank.

Panel 6: Marta looks towards the porch, where the protagonist is sitting on a rocking chair in the far distance, smoking a cigarette.

1. MARTA: ...Or maybe he just wanted to get out of the city himself.
2. MARTA: But...we're so far inland. This is the High Country.
3. MARTA: It's because he loves you, Francis.
4. MARTA: It must be.

ELEVEN.

Panel 1: It seems to be about the turn of the 20th century at the latest. The protagonist is out in a different field, fixing a fence. A pipe is sticking out of his mouth. He seems to be a cisgender male in this life. A little girl, BETHAN, stands watching him. Their hair is the same shade. The field overlooks the sea.

1. BETHAN: Prynhawn da. Sut dych chi?
2. PROTAGONIST: Dw i'n weddol.
3. BETHAN: <<Are you our father?>>
4. PROTAGONIST: <<I am.>>
5. BETHAN: <<All of us?>>
6. PROTAGONIST: <<Not the whole village.>>
7. BETHAN: <<That's not funny.>>

Panel 2: The little girl looks at the ground.

1. PROTAGONIST (OFF): <<You and your brother and sister.>>
2. BETHAN: <<Oh.>>

Panel 3: She looks up.

1. BETHAN: <<...Are you staying?>>

Panel 4: The protagonist keeps working.

1. PROTAGONIST: <<Long enough to mend the fence for your mother. That's it.>>
2. BETHAN: <<But you're coming back, right?>>
3. PROTAGONIST: <<A sailor doesn't know that, Bethan.>>

Panel 5: The protagonist gets up to bring his tools back to wherever they came from.

1. PROTAGONIST: <<I wouldn't have been a good father to you anyway.>>
2. PROTAGONIST: <<My apologies.>>

Panel 6: Bethan hurries to catch up to his long stride.

1. BETHAN: <<But why won't you try?>>

TWELVE.

Panel 1: The protagonist, older, is again sitting on the porch with his cigarettes. Marta, older still, stands next to him, staring out into the fields.

NO COPY

Panel 2: She looks down at him.

1. MARTA: Why are you a jinx?
2. MARTA: What did you do?

Panel 3: Close up on his hand as he puts his cigarette out into an ashtray on the porch floor.

1. PROTAGONIST: Now isn't the right time to talk about that.
2. PROTAGONIST: The air is wrong. The light is wrong.
3. PROTAGONIST: It's obscene to speak of it so far inland.

Panel 4: There's a glass buoy in a net hanging with Marta's tacky windchimes and plastic flamingo.

1. MARTA (OFF): We've been married sixteen years. The son you bore is almost a man and he's never known the color of your eyes.
2. MARTA (OFF): The least you can give us is your truth.

THIRTEEN.

Panel 1: Marta sits down on the porch stairs, peering at him with more compassion, reconciliatory.

1. MARTA: ...Your eyes are grey. Like the ocean.
2. MARTA: Were they always grey?
3. PROTAGONIST (OFF): I don't remember now.

Panel 2: Marta looks up at him, vulnerable.

1. MARTA: They're beautiful.

Panel 3: The protagonist, hundreds of years ago, and much younger, a child of twelve at the most, tanned dark from the sun. He's in the cargo hold, backed into a corner, equal parts terrified and furious. A SAILOR is looming over him. The protagonist's blue eyes are wide.

1. SAILOR: Yer eyes are real pretty, kid...
2. SAILOR: Come closer, will yeh? Come closer to this lonely old man.

Panel 4: Present day. The protagonist, eyes shut.

1. PROTAGONIST: I need to sleep alone tonight. I'll throw a blanket on the couch.
2. MARTA (OFF): Did I say something wrong?

Panel 5: The protagonist, again as a child, standing barefoot on the ship's rail as she bucks and heaves against a turbulent sky. In his hand is a knife, slick with blood that hasn't yet washed off in the rain. He looks down at the sea, face just as stormy, as if he's demanding something of it. His due.

1. PROTAGONIST (OFF): No, Marta, you didn't.

Panel 6: Present day. Marta tilts her head, studies him, eyes searching.

1. MARTA: I still love you, you know.
2. PROTAGONIST (OFF): Yes, I know.

FOURTEEN.

Panel 1: The farmhouse bathroom. Marta sits on the side of the tub, biting her nails. Francis, now seventeen, fidgets, standing.

1. SFX: **wwwwhhhrrrrr**
2. FRANCIS: Mom, do you hear that?
3. FRANCIS: It's the tornado coming.

Panel 2: Francis glances away, scowling, reluctant to admit his father is on his mind.

1. FRANCIS: So...where's Dad?

Panel 3: The bathtub faucet drips.

1. MARTA (OFF): He drove to the river, honey.
2. FRANCIS (OFF): Jesus. Again? Well, if he wants to die that's his business, I just wish he wouldn't take the pickup. Can we afford a new one if it gets messed up?
3. MARTA (OFF): Francis, don't disrespect your father.

Panel 4: A roaring river, almost cartoonishly monstrous. The water dark, the sky ugly. The protagonist stands at the riverbank, watching.

1. SFX: **WWWWWWWWWHHHHHRRRRR**

Panel 5: A wave rears up.

NO COPY

Panel 6: The wave parts, impossibly. The water, split in two, crashes along both sides of the untouched protagonist.

NO COPY

Panel 7: The protagonist stands impassively, looking at the sky, wind whipping his hair.

1. PROTAGONIST: No, I suppose not.
2. PROTAGONIST: I suppose you're not the same thing as the sea at all.

FIFTEEN.

Panel 1: A map of the watershed from the High Country to the Atlantic, showing how the rivers empty out into the sea.

SIXTEEN.

Panel 1: Thin white panel. A hospital wall.

1. SFX: *beeeep...beeeeeep...*

Panel 2: Two rows of feet, a Black man in business shoes sitting next to an elderly Black woman, both in hospital room guest chairs. There's a briefcase next to the Black man. On the handle of the briefcase is tied the albatross charm.

Panel 3: The aged protagonist lies in a hospital bed. Francis, now close to forty with slick, professional sunburst cornrows and a well-fitting business suit, sits with his briefcase next to an elderly Marta near the protagonist's bedside. Francis looks impatient.

1. FRANCIS: How long do you think - -
2. MARTA: - - Hush, child. I think he can still hear us.
3. SFX, small: *drip...drip...drip...*

Panel 3: Marta takes the protagonist's hand.

1. MARTA: Well...we made it this far, huh?
2. MARTA: I almost thought it wouldn't happen. I almost thought you wouldn't die with me.
3. MARTA: You know, I think I must have loved you the most, then. More than even - -

Panel 4: TIGHT PANEL. The protagonist's grey eye opens wide.

1. PROTAGONIST: Go now. I want to be alone. I want to die alone.
2. FRANCIS (OFF): Whatever. It smells like dead fish in here anyway. Come on, Mom.
3. MARTA (OFF): ...Francis, you don't understand...
4. SFX, larger: *drip...drip...drip...*

Panel 5: The air vent seems to be leaking water. A stain dribbles down the wall.

NO COPY

Panel 6: The protagonist smiles.

NO COPY

Panel 7: The vent is pushed off the wall by the force of the water coming through, an unnatural amount, roaring, coursing...

NO COPY

