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# FOUR FUCKS ANNE BONNY DID NOT GIVE AND ONE SHE DID

Libby Riddle

Anne Cormac did not give a fuck about decorum. Long before she became the West's most renowned female pirate, she could be found firing her father's pistols into the trunk of the weeping willow in their Charleston manor's backyard or picking fights with the sons of her wealthy neighbors. The cool grip of a pistol or a smirk knocked from a gentry boy's face was a wave crashing over the boiling pit inside her, filling in the lava's cracks and pores, cooling it to a heat that she could stand.

One night, the manor's English servant girl was being particularly irritating. Her Cockney accent grated on Anne's ears as she performed her kitchen duties. Anne was seated at the dining table attempting to balance a carving knife on her hand, and she simply could not focus with the girl blithering on about nothing. The third time her high-pitched whine caused Anne to drop the knife with a clatter, Anne snatched it up and stood from the table. She crossed the kitchen to where the servant girl was sitting on a stool scrubbing a cast-iron pot. It wasn't a conscious decision really. A gasp cut off the servant girl's chatter mid-sentence, followed by a thud as she slid from the stool to the floor. If Anne had known a carving knife to the back was all it would take to shut the girl up, she would have done it ages ago.

Anne Cormac did not give a fuck about her father's wishes. He was tireless in his attempt to relieve himself of Anne's company via her marriage to the closest suitable bachelor. Despite the allotment of eligible suitors in the greater Carolina colonies, he quickly discovered that it was difficult to marry off a girl known for her tenacity with a carving knife. All the better for Anne. Instead of attending society balls and tea parties that dulled her brain, she was free to wander the docks, where she could flirt with handsome sailors debarking from lengthy voyages during which they had longed for the company of a woman. One such sailor was John Bonny, young and gallant with hands roughed up from rope burn and saltwater. He had no reputation, no money, no future in her father's eyes, but he had something more valuable than any nobleman could give her. He got down on one knee, and instead of a ring, offered her a one-way

ticket on a ship leaving from the Port of Charleston at dawn. Without a thought for the colonies' expectations, she packed her bags, and eloped with John.

Anne Bonny did not give a fuck about her husband. John Bonny had served his purpose. He had been at the right place at the right time to whisk her away from her father and her life's tiresome socialite trajectory, but he had failed to deliver on his promise. John had turned from sailor to snitch, reporting on the activities of local pirates to Governor Rogers. Anne, not content to sit around waiting for her whistle-blower husband, took to spending her nights in the saloon where she drank and gambled with the very men John Bonny was chasing. Her fiery hair and fierier temper caught the attention of Calico Jack, the most dashing pirate south of St. Augustine. Jack liked that Anne could hold her liquor and give him a run for his money at stud poker. Anne liked Jack's ship. Jack offered John Bonny a handsome sum to divorce her, but his pride refused. John's inability to accept a good deal when it was offered was the final nail in his coffin. For the second time in her life, Anne boarded a ship in the dead of night headed due south to adventure.

Anne Bonny did not give a fuck about superstition. Pirate legend was that it was bad luck to have a woman aboard, but any man who objected to her presence would find himself thrown into the sea with a cutlass-sized hole in his back. The only other woman aboard, Mary Read, found a different solution. She masqueraded as a man, complete with a long frock coat and her very own tricorne hat. By day, Anne would fight by Mary's side, their backs pressed against each other as they gunned down enemy pirates and privateers too senseless to stay out of their way. After the battle, Anne and Mary would strip off their blood-soaked clothes and dress each other's wounds, recounting their best parries and most audacious stunts. When the two had drunk their share of looted rum, Anne would stumble back to Jack's quarters to spend her night in his bed, though more and more often she wished to be in Mary's.

Anne Bonny *did* give a fuck about Mary Read. Mary smoothed the edges of Anne's jagged soul with her crass jokes and the way she bumped Anne with her hip when she passed her in the berth. Before they went into battle, Mary would wish Anne luck and look her in the eyes, really look at her, like she saw beneath the bluster and arrogance to the girl who had been promised adventure over and over again and finally found it in a cross-dressing, cutlass-wielding Englishwoman upon the high seas.

As with most pirates, Anne and Mary's luck eventually ran out. Per-

haps Anne's former husband had finally mustered the courage to turn them in, or perhaps Governor Rogers had found them on his own, but pirate chasers were gaining on *The William* fast. Unfortunately for the pair, Calico Jack and his crew were so drunk from last night's raid they could not be roused into fighting.

With Governor Roger's fleet rapidly approaching, Mary shouted to them, "If there be a man among ye, come up and fight!" Anne punctuated her declaration by firing her pistol into the hold. Not a single man rose to their call to arms.

"Cowardly bastards," Anne said, retreating from her place at the entrance of the hold. "The whole lot of them."

Anne looked at Mary and saw an emotion written across her face she'd never seen before: fear. Steeling her nerves, she crossed the few feet separating her from Mary until their faces were inches from each other. "If not for this, every cowardly fellow would turn pirate." Anne could feel Mary's breath hot against her face. Mary broke their gaze to watch Anne's hand as she reached for her. Her fingers curled around Mary's waist as if she were about to pull her the rest of the way towards her. Instead, she released Mary's pistol from its holster and placed it in her hands. "Today we show them we, too, are fit for the sea."

The pair pivoted at the sound of a gangplank being lowered onto their starboard side. Governor Roger's crew poured onto the deck of *The William*, surrounding the women before they could even fire off their first round. Without another glance at each other, Anne and Mary set about cutting through the pirate chasers. The sailors were meant to take the women alive; Anne and Mary had no such orders. They shot straight until their pistols clicked empty, at which point they stabbed and slashed at any man that dared approach them. They fought like a cornered animal, desperate and wild, but as one creature. Mary hit a man in the temple with the hilt of her sword and Anne stole the knife from his sheath while he was dazed. Anne jammed her knee between another man's legs and sent him stumbling backward right into Mary's cutlass. Nonetheless, Roger's crew outnumbered Anne and Mary twenty to two.

As the women tired, the pirate chasers began to get the better of them. One man wrestled the cutlass from Mary's hands, and another sent Anne to her knees with a well-placed blow to her stomach. The pair kicked and bucked against their captors as they tried to escort them off the ship. The crew was forced to bind and gag them after Mary bit one of them and Anne clawed another across the face.

They were locked in the brig and brought to Jamaica for trial along with the rest of the now-sober crew of the immutable Calico Jack. While the court debated the morality of executing two women on charges of piracy, Anne watched Mary languish in the cell next door. A slash across Mary's stomach—a gift from Governor Rogers himself—had turned green and thick lines of infection climbed up her torso. Sparing no thought for her cowardly lover waiting to be hanged like a dog, Anne could do nothing as Mary grew weaker with every day. She lay upon a straw pallet, her eyelids fluttering and her fingers stretching for Anne or her lost cutlass. Anne whispered to Mary through the bars of their cells tales of their adventures, how she had forgotten Jack as soon as Mary sauntered aboard the deck of *The William*, how Mary had been to her what no man ever had: a friend. Countless men had failed her—her father, her husband, her captain and his crew—but one woman never did, even in death.