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Middle Grade Fantasy, 65,000 words < Manuscript info: age/genre/word count

Lorelei & Brigsby

(In which a girl and her septipus strive to become ~~mechanics~~ pirates.)

by Erica Ivy Rodgers

(This is your title page! It does NOT count as one of your 10 pages. You should have the header info, title of the work, and your name.)

The whole manuscript is in 12 pt Times New Roman and double-spaced (except for the contact info in your heading...that gets awkward if you double-space it!)

Name your manuscript submission like THIS: LASTNAME.TITLE.YEAR.docx
(NO SPACES, ALL CAPS)

Start of official 10 pages of your story!!!

PROLOGUE

In which a kingdom is saved by a fledgling pirate

If ever you are brave enough, aim an airship into the wind. Follow the stars and currents north, and watch as blue water bleeds to the color of steel. If you manage to pass the Kraken Isles (without mistaking a hungry tentacle for a place to land), you will find an island kingdom rising from the water and fog as if out of a dream.

Despite the cold, it is a warm, welcoming place—so long as you mind your manners. It's people, toughened by centuries of ice and salt, would rather wield a wrench than an axe, but can hit a wolf (or a thief) with either from fifty yards.

The island is neither large nor flat, so its people carved the City of Tunnels out of the cliffs near the sea. Eventually, three other cities perched, higher and higher up the island. The City of Stairs on the western face, with its stone arches and angles. To the east, the City of Strands and Shadows, where cables crisscross the sky like jungle vines and anchored airships cover the ground in shifting shade. And straight upward, at the mountain's summit, the City of Stratus pierces clouds with palaces of metal and glass.

So it was that the mechanics built the cities, and the cities built the mechanics—women and men with brilliant minds bending steel, stone, and steam to fit their dreams. To the rest of the world this island is The Reaching Kingdom, but its inhabitants simply call it The Reach. And the heart of the Reach—The City of Tunnels—remains nestled in the ribs of the mountain.

But layers can be tricky. Most times we only see what's on top, and cities with layers are no different. They hide things. Surprises. Danger. Or, more often than not, dangerous surprises.

It was to The Reach that the pirates first came, for when you live on the sea in prosperity, there are bound to be those who wish to take what you have. And that is what the pirates did. They took sugar, ore, and airships. They took sheep. They took children out of their beds and, when the Reachers fought back, the pirates took lives.

But one day a young mechanic from the City of Tunnels decided two things: he wanted to see the world, and he wanted to save his people.

He did them both, and thus became a legend.

50 YEARS LATER

1

Lorelei Lark flipped on the light as she entered her small workshop. "Good morning, Mr. Brigsby," she said, stifling a yawn. Silence. Lorelei glanced toward the corner where an aquarium as tall as she was stood empty. At least it looked empty. It always did when her closest friend was sleeping—hiding somewhere between the rocks and drifting seaweed. "Lazy bones," she said, then snickered. "That's silly. You don't have any bones."

The knot she'd tied in her hair pulled at her scalp. It was perfect. Too tight meant it couldn't get in her eyes, or worse, stuck in the cogs and gears as she worked. Long hair was best

for mechanics for the exact reason that it *could* be pulled back. All right, it was second best. The *best* would be no hair at all. But her father rejected that idea when Lorelei was seven.

She was almost twelve now, and every day was much the same in their little home above their littler shop, deep within the City of Tunnels. The city was by nature a dark place. Dark, but not cheerless. In the cluttered closet of a room Lorelei called her workshop, bulbs blazed as cheerfully as a crackling fire.

Lorelei hunched over the minuscule machine on her workbench and aimed the bare bulb onto the spherical casing she had finished yesterday. The dark metal was beautiful. Lines waved like ripples in a pond where she had stretched and bent it into shape over a small gas flame. It was a new discovery of her father's, this metal. He'd left last month in an empty airship and returned to the Reach with a small cargo of strange stone. From that stone Sig Lark had extracted this wonder material. He called it titan's silver. It was lightweight but extremely strong, and—if Lorelei was right—resistant to salt water. Resistant to tears.

Which was why she was using it to build an eyeball.

Her left eye twitched. She resisted the urge to rub at it.

To an outsider, every day in the shop would seem much the same. But for Lorelei every day was different, because though she always worked in the shop, there was always a new problem to solve. Her mind never sat still, and that was plenty of change for Lorelei.

A crash came from the other side of the wall threatening to throw Lorelei's tools from their hooks. Her father was getting ready to open the shop. No doubt he had tripped over the pile of mechanical arms near the counter. Lorelei shook her head and hid her smile, even though there was no way he could see her from the other room.

Lorelei looked at the wall. Maybe she should fix that. Surely there was a contraption she could design which would allow her to see the shop from back here.

A splash from the aquarium in the corner made Lorelei jump.

"Thank you, Mr. Brigsby," she said, and turned her focus back to her workbench.

The octopus emerged from hiding and bobbed his head in a silent *you're welcome*. He was a septopus, really. No respectable *octopus* had only seven arms. This was fine by Mr. Brigsby, for though he always minded his manners he had never been a respectable octopus, nor did he wish to be one. No fewer than three prosthetic tentacles dangled unused from the ceiling. Replacing limbs was their business, after all. But, no matter how nicely done, Mr. Brigsby refused to try one on.

Lorelei flipped a copper eyeglass down from her hat, zoomed in on the pieces in front of her, and let everything else around her fade. First, she stared. She considered every cog, spring, screw and rod. Then Lorelei closed her eyes, and *listened*.

She listened for the rhythm the gears and plates would make once she found their perfect places—when they would fit together like they were *created*, not built—when the eye would *work*. Brilliantly. Seamlessly.

Her head nodded. Once. Twice. Then again and again to a beat only she could hear. Lorelei opened her eyes and her lips began to move. A soft, constant rhythm seeped from Lorelei's mouth as her hands worked.

"Pfff...te...tst...ahhhh, pfff tst ahh, pfff...te...tst...ahhhh, pfff tst ahh..."

Small, lithe fingers gripped delicate tools. She flipped to a new lens on her goggles and zoomed in even closer. She was tightening the interlocking plates, which would become the

eyeball's cornea, when the shop bell jangled. Lorelei dropped a screwdriver and flipped up her eyeglass. The bell only rang when a customer entered. Her father never called her away from her tinkering, but being late was like a rusty wheel—it slowed things down. Lorelei scowled at Mr. Brigsby.

"Worthless cephalopod!" She jabbed a finger toward a bottle lodged in the rocks at the bottom of the aquarium. It was stoppered with a cork and sealed with wax. Inside was a clock. "I waterproofed that for a reason!"

Mr. Brigsby pointed to where the unfinished eyeball rocked slightly on the workbench.

"No," said Lorelei. "That is *not* more important than my father's customers!"

Brigsby shrugged all seven shoulders and slipped a tentacle through the tiny porthole near the aquarium lid to wave goodbye. She knew what the septopus thought of their life in the shop—that it was boring. He grew easily restless and often escaped to wander the tunnels. Well, *she* wasn't bored. The life her father had built for them was a well-oiled machine.

And if people in the Reach knew anything at all, it was that you didn't go messing with things that worked.

Lorelei slipped a black apron over her head as she dodged behind the counter. The dark fabric, thick as sailcloth, hid the grease when she wiped her hands on it. Light filtered through the shop's windows. Not the light of the sun, but the soft lamp-glow of the City of Tunnels. It

illuminated the polished stone floor and the dust motes dancing through the air. Part of Lorelei's job was to keep those motes from gumming up all the appendages hanging from the ceiling.

Her father was helping someone with a more private fitting behind a curtain in the back corner. Probably a leg. Having customers drop their trousers in the middle of the shop may have been faster, but it wasn't at all appropriate. Or so her father said.

"Morning, dear!" he called.

"Morning, Pabba!" Lorelei ran a finger down the list of the day's appointments. The first name on the list was Kenna, so Lorelei dug out a fresh sheet of sand paper before turning her attention to the pile of arms her father had left in the floor. She lifted each limb gently onto a hook along the wall behind the counter.

The display had been her idea. Customers said it brightened up the room, but Lorelei didn't care what the shop *looked* like. She cared about efficiency. It was much easier to find things when limbs weren't piled in drawers or tangled together in buckets. As Lorelei hung the last arm from its elbow joint, the front door opened.

"Morning, Miss Lark!" Kenna blinked behind his spectacles and shuffled inside. He was rumored to be the oldest man in the City of Tunnels, but Lorelei had never asked if it was true. His sparse beard was neatly trimmed, as was his hair. Kenna reminded Lorelei of a can opener, small and sharp, but he was always kind. He was also one of the few customers who didn't look at Lorelei like she had a spring for a head.

"Hello Kenna, how are you?"

"Oh, fine, fine," said the old man, shrugging out of his coat of fur and leather. The tunnels themselves were never cold, so he must have come from the courtyard near the docks.

"Any new ships in port?" asked Lorelei.

"No sign of the Peregrine, if that's what you mean," he said with a wink. "That Stormthief of yours due for a visit?"

Lorelei nodded. "Tomorrow!" she said. "He always comes on my birthday." The Stormthief was the best captain the Reach had, and he was practically family. The arrival of his airship, the Peregrine, was better for Lorelei than any holiday.

"Well I'm sure he'll be here, then," said Kenna, straightening his tidy gray vest. Lorelei would have complemented it had it not been set off by the bowtie. The things were hazards. She'd known three mechanics who met their end when a loose bowtie got caught in the vice-like teeth of a large pair of gears.

"Almost came in yesterday," said Mr. Raul. "This arm's been snagging on my sleeve."

"Hand it over then, and let's see what we've got," said Lorelei. The old man rolled up a sleeve with grease-stained fingers and unstrapped the false forearm from his bicep and shoulder. Unlike most of the limbs Lorelei's father made, Kenna's arm was wood.

Lorelei flipped her goggles down and examined the place where the pine met what was left of the old man's arm. It was a gentle bowl shape, meant to cup the arm just so, but it was rough on the edges. Lorelei used the sandpaper to knock off the minuscule splinters.

"Sir, a metal cup wouldn't require so much adjustment," she said as she sanded. "And it wouldn't catch on your shirts."

"Metal's cold," harrumphed the old man.

"Morning Kenna!" called her father from behind the curtain. It was a simple greeting, but Lorelei heard the note of warning. She closed her mouth and imagined one of her small clamps pinching her lips together.

"Morning, Sig!" Kenna leaned forward, resting his one elbow on the counter. He lowered his voice conspiratorially. "You have something else to say, Miss Lark. I can tell by the way your forehead is all wrinkled up under your goggles."

Lorelei smiled. "Metal is only cold *momentarily*," she said. "It would warm to your skin in no time."

Kenna pursed his lips. Lorelei finished sanding and turned her attention to the wooden hand.

"Would you at least let me attach a hook?" she begged. "This solid hand is so inefficient."

"A hook!" Kenna laughed. "Sig, your girl would send me out into the street looking like one of those infernal pirates! People would string me up!"

"No one's seen a pirate since long before I was born," Lorelei grumbled. Her father poked his head out from behind the curtain. His look was one she knew too well. *Hold your tongue*. Lorelei bit down on it to keep the words from spilling out.

Kenna was full of grog, of course. Pirates with hooks were nothing but bedtime stories. The real pirates who used to raid the Reach had light swords and heavy cannons, but that's where their technology ended. The only false limbs in the stories were peg legs. Made of wood. Kenna was more like a pirate now than he'd be with one of Lorelei's hooks, but her father stepped out from behind the curtain and she swallowed the urge to point it out.

If Kenna was a can opener, Sig Lark was a loaded catapult—a tower of energy waiting to be released. He strode to the counter and seemed to take up the whole shop, right up to its curved ceiling. But for all his bulk, you'd never hear him coming. Lorelei's pabba was as soft-footed as if he went everywhere on tip-toe. His long, bright hair was pulled back like Lorelei's, and his beard forked into two braids. Like hair, beards got in the way, but most men of the Reach kept them for warmth anyway.

Her father checked Lorelei's work with a smile and handed the arm back to Kenna. It was all for show. Lorelei was better at the delicate work than her father was. His big hands were great at drafting ideas and forging metal (or sawing off the remains of a limb that got the bad end of a stick of dynamite). But, more and more often, it was Lorelei who put his brilliant designs into practice.

"Thank you, thank you." Kenna replaced his coat and gave Lorelei a little bow. When he reached the front of the shop the door flew open, sending the old man reeling. Lorelei rushed forward to help, but all she managed to do was give him a softer landing. From beneath the pile of Kenna's coat Lorelei heard a voice that froze her like a broken water wheel.

"Sig Lark! It's happened again, and this time I'm pressing charges!"

It was Helga, the shop owner from next door. Lorelei wished Kenna would stay where he was, hiding her from the woman's looming shadow. Helga's name meant 'blessed,' but the only time Lorelei felt it applied was when the woman left.

Lorelei stood, dusting herself off. She was more than a little tempted to follow Kenna out the door.

"Helga, how are you?" said Lorelei's father from behind the counter. His smile was genuine—people often said charming—but it wasn't working today.

"You know exactly how I am!" said Helga. "Three brooches missing this morning, Sig. THREE."

"That's certainly unfortunate," said Lorelei's father. Lorelei edged around a barrel of mechanical feet toward the back of the room. She had to get to her workshop.

"It is unfortunate, for *her!*" Helga spun around, a lumpy finger pointing right at Lorelei. "This is the second time I've been stolen from in a week, and I *will not have it*. I am alerting the Guild Master. I came here first, out of kindness, to warn you."

"That's ridiculous," cried Lorelei. Her father glared, but she didn't care. "You can't take a *pet* before the guild."

"Pet or not, that octopus--"

"Septipus," said Lorelei.

"What did you say?" Helga's voice was dangerously low. Sig coughed, but Lorelei was tired of this stupid, stupid woman.

"I said he's a septipus. He's only got seven arms."

Helga's face turned such a vivid shade of magenta that Lorelei truly worried it might explode. That would make an unfortunate mess, so she scurried into the back room. Lorelei dodged out of earshot just as Helga began slinging words at her father that would make even a northern sailor blush. **END OF SAMPLE PAGES! Note that this is technically page 11, since the title page (page 1) doesn't count. Also, it stops mid scene. Which is OKAY. Feel free to tweak your story so that it ends somewhere you feel is appropriate, BUT DO NOT take it over the number of pages allowed.**

SYNOPSIS PAGE! Start your synopsis on its own page IN THE SAME WORD DOCUMENT.

It will technically be page 12 of your submission. It should be NO MORE than one page single-spaced.

DO NOT cheat on spacing or font size. I don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out when someone is trying to sneak something like that past me.

SYNOPSIS

In the far north, the people of the Reach live peacefully. There have been no signs of raiding pirates for fifty years, and the Queen has planned an enormous festival to celebrate. Burgeoning mechanic, Lorelei Lark, lives with her father above their prosthetics shop deep within the City of Tunnels. Lorelei gets along better with machines than people. She leans on her father to help her navigate the world, but she wakes on her birthday to find that he has disappeared, and rumors of pirates off the coast have the Reach more than a bit nervous.

Without her father, Lorelei is taken in by the Mechanic's Guild. With the help of her sidekick septipus, Mr. Brigsby, she begins the path toward the coveted role of Mechanic's Apprentice, determined to find out what happened to her father. 'Pets' aren't allowed, so she must keep Brigsby a secret—a difficult task, since the creature won't stop picking pockets or trying to assassinate anyone who looks at Lorelei the wrong way.

In the Guild, Lorelei is paired with the Reach's prince, Tinder, whose beautiful designs never work. Lorelei attempts to help him and, in exchange, he helps her look for information on her father, and tries to show her that humans can't be treated like machines. When they discover Lorelei's father was abducted by the pirates (and that Tinder's mother, the Queen, refuses to communicate with her enemies), they decide to fix the problem themselves.

Lorelei and Tinder navigate their apprenticeship trials while attempting to make contact with the pirates, but when one of Tinder's designs finally works, the Queen decides to use it to blow the pirates out of the sky. Lorelei and Tinder attempt to warn them, but Tinder is taken, just like Lorelei's father. In the end, it is up to Lorelei (and Brigsby) to convince the Reach and the Pirates that people really *are* like machines: every part is important, and they need to work together in order to face their common enemy—the spy who has been in the Reach teaching young apprentices for years.

NOTE: if you use a word processor other than Word, check the exported .docx before you send it. Pages, especially, likes to stretch things, and you may end up with a submission which is too long. Fix it before sending.